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COLUMBIA
JOURNALISM
REVIEW

JULY/AUGUST 1995

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"TO ASSESS THE PERFORMANCE OF JOURNALISM ... TO HELP STIMULATE CONTINUING IMPROVEMENT IN THE PROFESSION, AND TO SPEAK OUT FOR WHAT IS RIGHT, FAIR, AND DECENT" From the founding editorial, 1961

An Antidote to Crudity, Vulgarity, and Violence

The threat to cut public funding for public television was the subject of the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism's First Amendment Leadership Breakfast on April 26. Bill Moyers, television correspondent and producer, debated "PBS: To Be or Not To Be" with New York Post television critic John Podhoretz. Floyd Abrams, William J. Brennan Jr. Visiting Professor of First Amendment Studies at the school, moderated. The following are excerpts of Moyers's comments.

I'm not here this morning to say that public broadcasting has lived up to all the expectations that attended its birth. Like every human enterprise, it is a narrative of designs, many of which have failed. It is a cracked mirror.

Nor am I here to argue that public broadcasting should be exempt from the general belt-tightening made necessary by the inability of our political system to sort out priorities and to finance government responsibly. All of us, including public broadcasting, have to accept a proportionate share of austerity in this time of reckoning.

Public broadcasting's share is a pittance, though, compared to the billions spent every year on corporate welfare, local pork, and other subsidies. (Rupert Murdoch himself, one of the world's richest men, was recently awarded a tax break by Congress equal, by one estimate, to about one-fourth of public broadcasting's annual appropriation.)

What I would ask you to think about is whether every good a society seeks can be served by the marketplace. For good or ill, and it's both, television has become the all-encompassing environment of American society. You cannot escape its pervasive presence even if you turn your own set off.

It is the mix of programming which establishes the density, the quality, and the character of the overall media environment in this country. And I would contend that American society is somewhat less coarse, somewhat less vulgar, and that television entertainment is considerably less violent, because public broadcasting is in the mix.

My right-wing friends deplore the crudity, vulgarity, and violence of popular culture even as many of them staunchly defend, and even subsidize, the market forces that create and drive this unprecedented flood of mass-produced and mass-consumed images. This is the anomaly.

The appalling excretion of violent entertainment and instant gratification that so many Americans are concerned about are all driven by the market. I appreciate the market. I understand the market provides people with

their wants, but I would not want to live in a society where it is only the market that determines the total mix of the influences that shape our psychological, moral, and political mentality.

I'm not sure what it means to society that MTV would run repeatedly a hit song about a teen incest victim pumping a bullet into her daddy's brain. But I know it profits the market. I don't know what it means to society that my friend Barbara Walters can get huge audiences interviewing convicted murderers. But I know what it means to the market.

What these profit society I don't know, but I do know that a psychologist at the University of Illinois who studied a set of children for twenty years found that kids who watch significant amounts of television violence at the age of eight were consistently more likely to commit violent crimes or engage in child or spouse abuse at thirty.

What we are witnessing in America today, caused by many forces, is a devaluation of life and public discourse that requires in response a strategy of affirmation by society as a whole. Homes, schools, churches, synagogues, newspapers, all the institutions that transmit values need to respond with affirmation to such vile images. I believe that public broadcasting, for all our flaws, is part of that strategy of affirmation.

Leo Strauss once wrote that liberal education is liberation from vulgarity. He reminded us that the Greeks had a beautiful word for vulgarity; they called it *apeirokala*, the lack of experience in things beautiful. Vulgarity is the lack of experience in things beautiful. In its own modest and halting way, public television has something to offer — performing arts, extended conversation, travel, nature, children's programs, the many interests of art and life that cultivate the moral imagination and human sensibility show up in one way or another sooner or later on public broadcasting.

If life is a continuing course in adult education, television can be a universal classroom for the arts and the humanities. When Richard Strauss's opera *Electra* aired last December, the biggest segment that watched at least some of that programming, 39 percent of the audience, earned less than \$40,000. This is public education in one sense of the word — available to all, irrespective of means.

I say we are enjoined to try to find a way to protect this fragile but important institution from the new majority in Congress that instead of trying to reconstruct and recreate it, would smash it instead with a wrecking ball. ♦

LETTERS

SWAN SONG IN HOUSTON

Geneva Overholser's quoted comments about the relentless squeeze on newspaper budgets ("A Swan Song in Des Moines," *CJR*, May/June) had a familiar ring, one that I fear too many reporters and editors are hearing these days.

I worked at the now-defunct *Houston Post* in editing and management positions from 1973 to 1992, the final one being assistant editorial page editor. The last five of those years, under Dean Singleton's MediaNews ownership, were not happy ones. They were filled with concerns for the paper's future along with a perception on my part and that of most of my colleagues that the corporation's top management had a disregard bordering on contempt for staff and readers alike. I mention this to alert *CJR* readers that I may have an ax to grind.

That said, let's look at a few facts — or as close as you can come to facts regarding a closely held corporation that never shows its books to anybody.

First, it was cynical and misleading of Singleton to point to the newsprint prices of May 1995 (roughly \$675 per ton) against those of a year earlier (less than \$400) as though that tells the whole story. Any competent industry observer knows that these represent record highs and lows of the last fifteen years. Although \$675 a ton is decidedly hurting the whole industry, newsprint topped \$600 a ton the year after Singleton bought the *Post*, but no one threatened to fold the newspaper then.

Second, April's sale and closing give truth to the widespread rumors that the *Post* had been a financial house of cards since the day Singleton bought it. It speaks volumes that he paid \$150 million — heavily leveraged — in 1987, sold it to Hearst in 1995 for \$120 million, and told The Associated Press that his Consolidated Newspapers (which succeeded MediaNews in Houston as the owner of record) would make a profit. Add to that the fact that Singleton's various corporations are legally walled off from each other so that if one

fails, it can't drag down any others. There is a certain hard-eyed business merit in this, I suppose, but it also means that if one hits a rough spot, the others aren't in a position to help carry it, even briefly. There are 1,900 people now out of work in Houston who could tell you a lot about that.

Less than four years ago, a *Post* staffer told me that the operating philosophy there seemed to be that "a dachshund can pull a freight train, if you have a big enough whip." That about captures it, but for good measure, add in a supposition that the readers don't notice when quality of coverage declines. When the *Post* closed, it had a circulation of about 290,000 and a newsroom staff of about 180 — skimpy proportions by any standard, and down from an all-time high of nearly 200. David Burgin, the first of three editors-in-chief under Singleton, told me early in his tenure that he expected a 50 percent newsroom turnover in the first year, as though this were something to be proud of. The point, clearly, was to replace seasoned hands with cheaper new hires.

The *Houston Post* was not without its flaws, but for 111 years it faithfully printed the news, got a few rascals thrown out, earned a Pulitzer along the way, conceded nothing to the competition, and showed great heart. In April 1995, Dean Singleton killed it without even the decency of a farewell edition — a death without a funeral.

CHARLES REINKEN
Fayetteville, N.C.

JUNGLE WARFARE

Yes, "It's a Jungle Out There" (*CJR*, May/June). But very few reporters have ever looked at the core issue here, which is the lack of local representation on the Adirondack Park Agency, which was state-imposed, governs without the consent of the governed, and essentially puts residents under colonial rule. Very few have ever delved into the finances of the "environmental" organizations here, or made known their interlocking directorates and political connections. Very few reporters have gone beyond the easy, extremist quotation to



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find out who, if anybody, really speaks for Adirondackers.

Yes, there have been scattered incidents of violence in the Adirondacks, which by the way also involved "Earth First!" and Adirondack Council activists on the other side of the spectrum. Kevin Carmody should concede that point. But more important, he should acknowledge that further heavy regulatory and legislative proposals, particularly when crafted behind closed doors, are acts of violence themselves.

It was reporting like Carmody's that prompted me to start my own newsletter, covering the powerful Adirondack Park Agency with a cold eye. I see from your masthead that your publication is supported in part by the MacArthur and New York Times Foundations, both of which were heavily connected with the last attempt to take from Adirondackers what those in their circle won't give up themselves. How cold is your eye?

SUSAN ALLEN

Editor and publisher

Adirondack Park Agency Reporter
Keane Valley, N.Y.

Kevin Carmody replies: *A key point of my article was that journalists do need to dig deeper into all aspects of such issues, not blindly accept the perspective of whatever side at that moment seems to represent conventional wisdom, be that Greenpeace or the property-rights group (the Fairness Coalition) that Allen helped lead. But I cannot concede something that, according to sources including a New York State Police investigator, would be incorrect. Senior investigator Richard Sypek, who for several years handled park-related cases including arson, threats, assaults, and criminal mischief, told me that to his knowledge the environmental activists have been "involved" in violent acts only as victims. "The wise-use people are the aggressors," he said. Earth Firsters do carry out acts of civil disobedience. That might make them pests, but I'm not sure that using their own bodies to block access to a road or a pond qualifies as violence.*

THE NEW CYNICISM (CONT'D)

"A Generation of Vipers" (CJR, March/April) has the ring of truth. I was in the world of journalism for thirty years, first in a West Coast bureau of a national newspaper and then in the Washington bureau of a major news organization, before switching to public relations.

My public relations experience has been

at universities and large nonprofit scientific organizations. During the time I have been on the other side of the fence, I have seen the relationships between institutions and reporters steadily and inexorably deteriorate. The legacy of Watergate has been unbridled ambition by reporters to make a name in the news business by exposing somebody doing something. That preoccupation is the hallmark of journalists, particularly in Washington. And their guns are not just trained on politicians. The truth is that reporters do not believe that institutions of any kind have legitimate points of view. In fact, the assumption is that all institutions, like all politicians, lie.

Cynicism among journalists is no longer acquired, it is congenital. And the possibility that this profound distrust, which plays itself out every day in a thousand news reports, has helped unleash the hounds that invaded Oklahoma City is something that should give all of us pause.

ROBERT A. POTTER

Annapolis, Md.

On the other hand, who among us is sufficiently noble in spirit to consider the adulation of traitorous perjurers, the political rehabilitation of a repudiated president, the assumption of power by mindless reactionaries, the "defense" budget, and Alfonse D'Amato, without casting the jaundiced eye of cynicism upon res publica?

I ain't.

ROBERT C. SOMMER

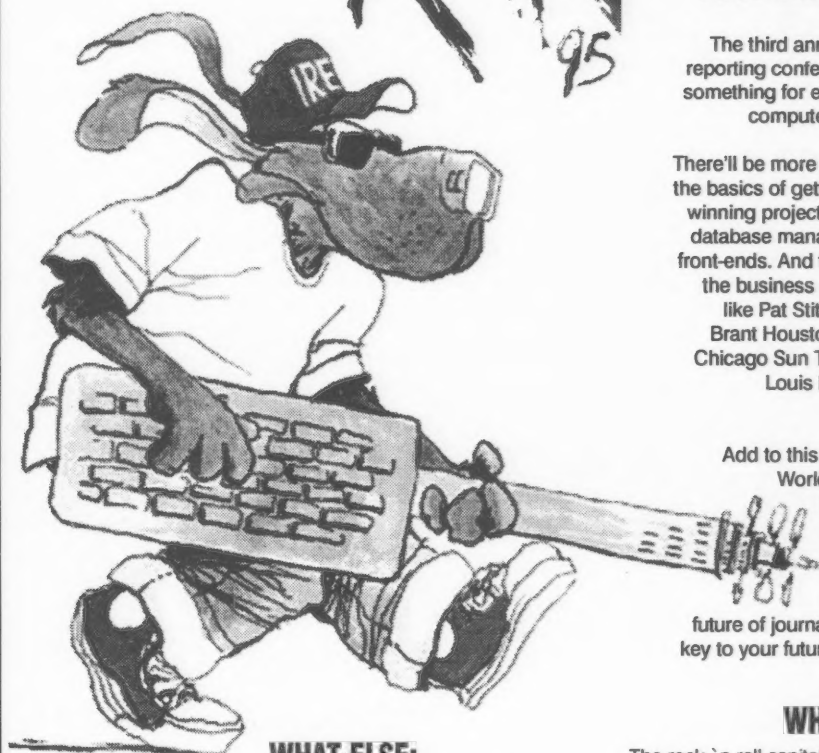
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Too much cynicism? Christ, I wish there were more! The biggest problem in today's print is the studied detachment, mixed with sheer laziness, that passes for "objectivity." Where is the sense of outrage that should motivate reporters to dig out the truth? Reporters don't have to be biased or judgmental to do their job. They just have to be honest — with themselves and with their readers.

Take those stories about politicians using their office to line their pockets. We give them space to deny the allegations, to denounce us, to let their lawyers denounce us, to say they've done nothing wrong, and then nothing illegal, and then nothing that actually hurt anyone. And when they finally plead guilty, we give them plenty of space to explain that they're only pleading out in order to "spare their family," keep the costs down, and avoid the continued persecution in the media. It's a routine. But you owe it to readers to question the whole circus. If that's cynicism, give me more.

Take negative stories about the government. For years I covered the CIA and the

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suit against it by Janine Brookner, a.k.a. Jane Doe Thompson. I listened as the CIA denied they'd covered up wife-beating by a male agent; that they punished Jane Doe for disciplining him; that they'd retaliated against her. I was called to a semi-private briefing about the perfection of the CIA's personnel system. And when the agency finally settled the case (being caught red-handed with false evidence), we in the press had to report, in the name of fairness, the CIA's pathetic insistence that they'd done nothing wrong. They were merely settling the largest sex-discrimination case in their history — for \$410,000 plus legal fees — because they needed to go on with their real work and stop letting that nasty court business upset "the community."

In print, only *The New York Times* and *U.S. News and World Report* took the time and effort to follow the CIA's official spin with the spin-busting facts. It would be good for the government as well as the readers if more reporters on this story had been sufficiently cynical.

Spin was the essence of the Contract with America. Pardon me for not believing the contract is the greatest government policy tract since the Federalist papers. How much credence should a reporter give a campaign ploy that turns out to be nothing more than the carefully crafted work of a pollster? Who was more cynical? The press? Or the politician — Gingrich, who, with pollster Frank Luntz, determined which points would be included in the contract based on whether they registered 60 percent popularity or more in a focus group test? That's as cynical a view of the voters and readers as I've seen.

Please give Maureen Dowd her due. She's slick, but at least she goes for substance. Too many "writers with attitude" still lack a perspective. As Starobin notes, they can kick the subjects with flair. If only their savaging had a point, if their surface cynicism revealed a deeper truth about their subject. Instead of being merely satirically cynical, they'd do readers a service if they were genuinely outraged.

Starobin suggests that we don't trust our politicians' motives, even when they amazingly do the right thing. I hope the hell we don't. We are swamped with notices of "photo ops" from Democrats and Republicans alike. There isn't a disaster that doesn't attract politicians like barnacles. And presidential and congressional candidates jump on police heroes like sea gulls on a French fry. Do they sometimes say courageous, thoughtful words? Yes. Do they help publicize the needs of the victim or the deeds of the rescuer? Yes. But is their activity legitimate? Well, let's just say

CJR IN CYBERSPACE

The editors welcome computer-savvy readers to CJR's newly created home page. The address, or URL, is <http://www.cjr.org/>. The site features a description of CJR, its masthead, the current-issue contents page, and a way to e-mail notes or for-publication letters to the editor. In addition, thanks to an agreement with the Pulitzer Prize board and with the Pulitzer winners for 1995, the site contains a collection of this year's winning entries — full articles, photos, and cartoons, even a brief snatch of Martin Gould's *String Music*, the winning musical entry this year. The editors plan to add more features to the home page in the coming months.

All letters, whether sent by regular mail or e-mail, must include the writer's street address, phone number, and, where appropriate, professional affiliation.

they're politicians, and they're doing what they're supposed to do. (Like the scorpion who's supposed to sting; you can't get mad at him because he's a scorpion, but you can report that he is one.) When a politician is being opportunistic, it would be dishonest for a reporter to overlook it.

In closing, I do agree with Tom Hamburger that it helps to get away from "operating norms" — for example, looking at foreign health care reforms, to see what works and what doesn't. After the Oklahoma bombing, some papers actually researched and reported on how other countries were dealing with different forms of internal and external terrorism. The stories were informative and much more useful than another report on Washington politicians bickering about blame.

However, a good, cynical reporter might follow up with stories on how and why some of those effective responses to terrorism would be rejected or accepted on the basis of political expediency. Does that sound cynical? Maybe, but that's how the world works — inside the Beltway, and beyond.

ALICIA MUNDY
Alexandria, Va.

CORRECTION

CJR's November/December photo essay on the late South African journalist Kevin Carter failed to correctly identify the source of the photos. The small photograph of Carter and Ken Oosterbroek should have been attributed to Nike Zachmanoglou/Sygma; all of the others, to Kevin Carter/Sygma.

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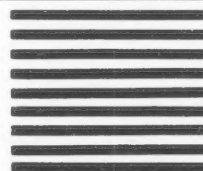
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WHOWHATWHENWHEREWHY

big story, small screen

Never before have journalists had the technical resources to transmit the actual sight and sound of life instantaneously around the planet. And yet, the "reality" television news viewers get is frequently cropped and garbled.

Much of this degradation is due to rush or human fallibility, but a large part stems from television's defining qualities:

- It's a small screen, and it doesn't take much to fill it.
- It's the most mass of mass media, and communicates with its vast audience in a conventional language that can be as confusing as it is efficient.

These limitations hurt most when reality is at its most unconventional — and thus its most newsworthy. Then, television's conventional coverage holds up a mask, not a mirror, to reality.

The extraordinary "moment of silence" observed the afternoon of Sunday, April 23, for the victims of the Oklahoma City bombing is a recent example of TV coverage breaking through



to the viewer. But CNN had to get past its own conventions first.

CNN was live as an unnatural quiet fell across America. Except for anchors Bernard Shaw and Wolf Blitzer. Even after viewers could see an exterior shot of a church in Oklahoma City's devastated downtown, and sense, surrounding it, the halt of normal noise and bustle, the anchors kept anchoring.

Shaw and Blitzer seemed to be awaiting some formal announcement that the silence had begun, and then, half a minute later, as they noticed that it had, the impulse to narrate overpowered the impulse to listen.

"A hush has fallen over the eleven to twelve thousand people gathered here in this arena," noted Shaw, who twenty seconds later

was still saying, "If you could have virtual silence in a room with twelve thousand people . . .," and again, "I've never heard this before," without letting us hear it. Only after Blitzer had chimed in that there was "not a peep coming out of this audience," only after a minute of conventional play-by-play obscured what it might have revealed, did the announcers cease.

The next ninety seconds were unlike almost anything ever broadcast on television. Silence. Silence and silence and silence over pictures of silent thousands in the hall, and the chimeless belltower outside, and the motionless workmen at the Murrah Federal Building. Silence spoke.

When the orchestra in the hall resumed, pianissimo, in the background, Shaw and Blitzer

resumed, as well: "That, a moment of silence . . ."

And the show went on. What had been transcendent reality became just television and television went back to its familiar pictures and familiar texts — clutched teddy bears, weeping faces, joined hands. Moving, no doubt, but moving TV.

In the same way that conventional coverage almost denied viewers the reality of that Oklahoma Sunday, the old familiar words-and-pictures hurricane formula failed spectacularly to communicate the literal, visual, actual "storm of the century," Hurricane Andrew.

The TV code for hurricane is familiar: palm trees bending to the gale, surf splashing over the humbled shore, missing roofs, homeless people showing up in local gyms. You see it once or twice most years.

Then, along comes Andrew in 1992 and the pictures are the same, and so is the response. Even in a well-wired White House, with independent additional sources of information, it was days before it dawned that people in Florida were afraid

and angry because they knew what had hit them but no one in authority seemed aware. Even though they could see it on television.

What I remember best, but probably communicated worst, about this amazing event was the sound. As Andrew unfolded over Morgan City, Louisiana, where I happened to be stationed for *Nightline*, I heard a buildup of windscreech that swelled in volume and tone like the exhalation of a jungle cat. This sound could no more be compressed into a blip of "natural sound" than a Mozart melody.

Notwithstanding long hours of coverage, TV (including my reports for *Nightline* and *World News*

Now) never found time to let the storm speak in its own full voice. The long listen to Andrew's wind was not done, not because it couldn't be done, but simply because it isn't done.

Then came Rwanda. If ever reality ranged out of the ordinary it was there. The reportage that awed me conspicuously trashed the conventions of TV news.

"There are some stories that can never be told. This is one of them." So began my colleague Jim Wooten's brief voice-over narration of videotape he'd gathered in Goma, Zaire, for the July 26, 1994, *Nightline*. The crowd of refugees was too vast for the eye, much less the camera, to comprehend. Their

terror, stench, *need*, could not be seen. "Not with these pictures, nor these pictures, or a million more," Wooten's narration confessed.

And then, speaking directly to the camera, Wooten countered the camera's potential for framing things in ways you may too quickly think you understand.

"It is not like the famine in Somalia. It is not like the flight of the Iraqi Kurds into the mountains of Iran and Turkey. It is not like the siege of Sarajevo." And as he spoke this, we saw no Somalians, Kurds, or Sarajevans, just Wooten, and a look in his eyes that underscored his prose: "It is not like anything I've seen in thirty years as a reporter."

Three nights later, the next *Nightline* report from Goma eschewed pictures and conventional coverage even more completely, focusing in on debriefing the witnesses — Wooten, his producers Rick Wilkinson and Leroy Sievers, cameraman Fletcher Johnson, and sound recordist Trevor Barker. As they told what they'd seen, felt, smelt, they communicated it better than pictures could, in part because the lack of pictures said, "Listen closely."

Their words, their devastated faces, better mirrored Rwanda than any image a picture-hardened public could see.

Dave Marash

Marash is a correspondent for ABC News Nightline.

paper trail

Are newsprint prices threatening the financial soundness of the newspaper industry? This chart, based on inflation-adjusted dollars, shows that what is really happening is neither disastrous nor unpredictable.

Prices used to construct the chart, gathered by *Pulp & Paper Week*, are east-coast transaction prices (what buyers actually paid, as opposed to list prices). The cost of newsprint peaked in 1977 at \$837 per long ton (in 1995 dollars). The high demand of the 1970s sparked an increase in

production capacity, and prices fell slightly. The peak price of the 1980s was \$778, reached in 1988.

Newsprint is a cyclical business. So is newspaper advertising. Because their cycles are opposing — high advertising creates more demand for newsprint, and the higher demand leads to higher newsprint prices — they tend to have a leveling effect on a newspaper's bottom line.

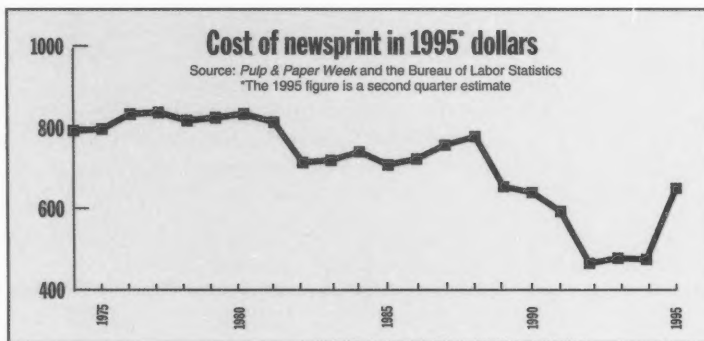
In 1989, excess paper production collided with an advertising recession that reduced demand, and suppliers were

forced to discount heavily to move their product. Publishers, trying to compensate for lower advertising revenue, drove hard bargains that led to discounts as great as 37 percent off the list price. To stay solvent, papermakers shut down their least efficient plants, some of them permanently.

Now advertising has come back, and newsprint is in greater demand. The newsprint suppliers are still giving discounts, but they are not as deep. The good news for

newspapers is that the long-term newsprint price trend is down. The peak in the 1980s was below that of the 1970s, and the peak in this decade could be even less.

The bad news is equally evident from the chart. The cost



of newsprint still has a way to go to reach its expected peak. The \$650 shown on the chart for 1995 represents an estimate for the second quarter of the year, and prices are still moving higher. Publishers using newsprint prices as an excuse for slashing newsroom budgets will find plenty of new ammunition.

Phil Meyer

Meyer is a Knight Professor of Journalism at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

hiroshi who?

Take the down-home appeal of Tom Brokaw, the earnest look of Dan Rather, and the magnetism of Peter Jennings. Mix in some Rush Limbaugh, a soupçon of Julia Child, and a dash of Pat Sajak. Blend and ship to Japan. Meet Hiroshi Kume.

While his name means nothing to American TV viewers, Kume is one of the most-watched news anchors in the world. Each weeknight he draws a 20 percent share of the audience to his eighty-minute program on TV Asahi (more than any of the American news anchors),

according to Video Research Ltd. of Tokyo. In a country of 125 million where television saturation is nearly 100 percent, Kume has a powerful voice for someone whose TV career began in the kitchen as a cooking show host and flourished as the emcee of music and variety shows.

Kume freely admits that since he knew none of the rules of journalism in 1985 when he took his first and only journalism job, he broke them with impunity. Before Kume recreated the role of newscasters in Japan, news shows were the bastion

of the boring. Tradition required each program to have one dreary but respected older gentleman in a dark suit sitting slightly in front of a demure female, whose job was mainly to smile, bow politely, and read some light society stories. Occasionally, she got to read the weather.

Kume roared onto the airwaves with a very different style. His clothing was hip; his delivery rapid-fire. He gestulated to the camera to underscore a point, he brought on props — exploding volcanoes to help describe natural disasters or life-size mannequins of Mikhail Gorbachev to introduce the Soviet leader to his audience. He grimaced at political corruption and he

laughed out loud. "Reporting things impartially, or from a neutral point of view, is just impossible," Kume told an interviewer in 1991. "You can appear to be neutral, but it is not possible to really be so."

Kume's own feelings, thoughts, biases, and quirks fill "News Station," his nightly broadcast. In 1989, when his favorite baseball

team, the underdog Hiroshima Carp, was matched against the powerhouse Yomiuri Giants for Japan's Central League pennant, Kume said he would shave his head if the Giants



won. He appeared with a crew cut the night after the game.

"I do not see where there's anything fundamentally wrong with cracking a joke in a newscast," Kume said soon afterwards. "If we can be talking about the tragic loss of life in a volcanic eruption in one breath and switch in the next breath to a commercial for cockroach traps, what kind of intrinsic decorum does television really have, anyhow?"

But Kume prides himself on being only part fluff. He gets serious when he says his job is to "protect the people from the government." And when he decides to put on his public advocacy hat, even the most powerful politicians in Japan run for cover. One night, when he was charting the flow of millions of dollars from a scandal-ridden construction company into coffers of the LDP, then Japan's most powerful political party, and other senior politicians, Kume looked into the camera and said, "Hard to believe they run the country this way, isn't it?"

In October 1992, Kume focused his attack on the most powerful man in the murky world of Japanese politics, Shin Kanemaru. The shadowy political figure once held the position

of deputy prime minister, but his real power was as a political dealmaker. Kume began an on-air campaign to oust Kanemaru from office after Kanemaru admitted taking \$4 million in illegal campaign contributions from a mob-linked trucking company. He raised its dramatic content one night when he announced to his millions of viewers "I might be killed" because "gangsters are involved" in the Kanemaru scandal. Like many of Kume's antics, the announcement was part theatrics and part truth. Viewers remembered how the respected filmmaker Juzo Itami had been knifed across the face in May 1992 by attackers after his anti-gangster movie *Mimbo No Onna* was released.

But Kume did not back off. One night he mimicked politicians stuffing cash in their pockets. He reported on local assemblies across the country that condemned Kanemaru. Kume's on-air campaign was not the only reason, but Kanemaru did resign his seat in disgrace.

Kume does not limit his barbs to domestic events. Last year, he offended the military junta in Burma by refusing to call the country by the name they have chosen, Myanmar,

SOUNDBITE

"In our media-driven culture, we must help victims and survivors exercise the right to say, 'I need to be left alone right now. If you follow me you are being unkind.' Many reporters welcomed the boundaries that we set in Oklahoma City, and said privately that it dignified their efforts, giving them an answer for editors who were pressuring them to behave more aggressively."

From an unpublished article by Dr. Daniel Nelson, a professor of psychiatry at the University of Oklahoma Medical School in Tulsa, who helped counsel victims' families after the Oklahoma City bombing.

and referring to it as "that country" or "the country west of Thailand." Kume says he refuses to use the name Myanmar because it was created by the military government.

In January, the influential French weekly, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, called Kume one of the world's fifty most influential people, citing the reverberations his style of newscasting has had on Japan. His ability to connect with the vast numbers of Japan's middle class has given him control of Japanese television at night. In that way, he walks the same path as his American nighttime hero, David Letterman.

Spencer A. Sherman

Sherman is an Abe Fellow with the Social Science Research Council. He was a television producer in Asia for six years.

double trouble a new headache for writers

While sparks continue to fly between magazines and their free-lance contributors over electronic reproduction rights (see "Database Dollars," *CJR*, September/October 1992), a pair of clauses are creeping into magazine contracts that could not only be economically dangerous to free-lancers but might also have a chilling effect on investigative and critical journalism.

This newly expansive warranty and its partner, the blanket indemnification clause, are showing up in an increas-

ing number of free-lance contracts. The former requires the free-lancer to vouch that the piece won't violate any of a long list of individual and corporate rights; the latter obliges the writer to pay legal fees and damages if any legal action is taken in response to the article that can be traced to an infringement, or alleged infringement, of those rights. If an ornery subject sues — or even threatens to, and the magazine engages a lawyer to deal with it — the free-lancer is liable for all costs. The risk of legal challenge, once shared by publisher and writer, shifts entirely onto the writer's shoulders.

In the past, a writer warranted only that the piece was original and neither libelous nor defamatory. Now these warranties are far more

sweeping. "The Work [does] not violate or infringe upon the copyright . . . , rights of privacy and/or publicity, or any other statutory, common law or other rights of any party," reads Hearst's *Good Housekeeping* contract. Giant Condé Nast asks writers to affirm that the work will not "give rise to any claim by any third party."

To truly hold to such a promise, a writer would have to be familiar with statutes in every state and be able to predict every potential third party's behavior. "It's a bad-faith clause," says David Goodman, co-chair of the journalism campaign for the National Writers Union, "because it asks writers to guarantee something they can't."

Far more pernicious than the expanded warranty,

the evening news *ALB TATLER*

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COUDIE CHUNG,
BUT THERE'S
STILL A
PROBLEM.
THE PROBLEM
IS YOU,
DAN.



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CUTER, JENNINGS
IS SMOOTHER.
ALL YOU ARE
IS TENSE, DAN.

THE NEWS IS
BAD ENOUGH
WITHOUT US
HAVING TO
LOOK AT A
BROODING
ANCHOR.



O.J. WITHOUT
THE JUICE?
THAT'S A
NO-NO, DAN.



IT'S THE
BOTTOM OF
THE NINTH.
LIGHTED UP
OR LIGHT OUT.



AND THAT'S
PART OF OUR
WORLD TONIGHT.
DAN RATHER
REPORTING.

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though, is the cargo of dynamite — the indemnification clause — riding behind it: “You [the writer] hereby agree to indemnify Hearst and its licensees and assignees from any and all claims, demands, and liabilities (including reasonable counsel fees) arising out of or resulting from the breach or claimed breach of the foregoing representations and warranties.” In other words, you, the writer, pay. It used to be that the magazine’s lawyer

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d i n g h y t o s i n k . ”

Some writers have been able to modify or delete such clauses. One Gruner & Jahr contract places the clause in brackets, as if to delete it if requested. *Literary Cavalcade*, published by Scholastic Inc., has an indemnification clause, though at least one writer deleted the phrase “or

alleged breach”; she’d only have to pay if the magazine lost a suit. A writer for *Modern Maturity*, published by the American Association of Retired Persons, crossed out the whole indemnification without a problem.

Yet *Harper’s* has refused to take the clause out, the Rodale Press contract starts with it, and *The New York Times Magazine* has recently begun to require the writer to “reimburse [the company] for any loss or expense if these

warranties are not kept.” Among these warranties is the exclusion of libelous or the vaguely worded “other unlawful material.” *Smithsonian’s* clause, though it sounds tentative, is no less binding than its more lucid cousins: “You may be held responsible for any expenses incurred as a result of any claim of a violation of these warranties.”

Legal fees, of course, even to get a case dismissed, are “prohibitive to a free-lancer,” says a lawyer for the Libel Defense Resource Center, and getting to summary judgment can run “in the tens of thousands.”

While most contracts include some warranty clause, not every publisher holds writers financially responsible for breaches. Hachette and Condé Nast still simply ask that the writer cooperate in responding to and defending against claims.

A few do better: *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and *Yankee Magazine* cover the free-lancer under their own insurance policies.

And there is some feeling that these clauses’ bark may be worse than their bite — legally binding, but to the publisher not worth enforcing. Lawyers in the field say they’ve not yet heard of a publisher suing a writer over one, and they concede that doing so might be akin to trying to get blood out of a radish. So what is the language doing there? Two lawyers for gigantic publishers said the same thing, in practically the same words. Publishers put in the clauses “because they can,” as one put it, “and writers will sign the things.” “Pure and simple,” said another, “our job is to protect the interests of the company — not to establish relationships with writers.”

The indemnification clause may be no big deal to the publisher, but it’s scary to a writer potentially signing a house away on the dotted line. That’s why organizations representing free-lancers, such as The American Society of Journalists and Authors, and the National Writers Union, have strongly condemned the practice.

And beyond the ethical and economic problems these clauses represent, they could have another result unforeseen by the penny-wise lawyers who pen them. A free-lance writer might wonder, Should I go after this rumor that Newt Gingrich embezzled \$300,000 from a startup private-prison company? How about publishing the heresy that Roseanne looked better fat? Am I going to risk my life’s savings for a \$2,500 fee?

Judith Levine
Judith Levine is a free-lance writer who lives in Brooklyn.

Lithuania: a killing and a crusade

On October 12, 1993, after Vitas Lingys, deputy editor of the second-largest daily newspaper in Lithuania, left for work, his wife Laima Lingiene heard a popping sound. Rushing outside, she saw her husband lying in a pool of blood. “I knelt by him and took his hands,” she said in her first published interview a year later. “I understood — he is not just wounded.” He was dead, in fact, with three bullets in his head fired from point-blank range.

Who would want to kill the thirty-three-year-old journalist? Colleagues on his newspaper, *Respublika*, a tabloid with a circulation of about 80,000, didn’t think they had far to look. From the beginning of its six-year life, *Respublika* had put a priority on reporting crime. Coverage had been particularly intense during the year preceding Lingys’s murder, as *Respublika* came out with story after story about the growing strength of the criminal underworld in Lithuania, particularly a group based in the capital known as the Vilnius Brigade.

The pieces certainly were relevant. Since regaining independence in 1991, Lithuania, the former Soviet republic on the Baltic Sea, has been plagued by the same daunting problems confronting all societies of post-communist Europe — staggering economic crises, weak and sometimes corrupt government officials, and a power vacuum that criminals are all too quick to exploit. The crime rate has tripled since 1988.

Lingys's murder signaled another sinister trend in the former Soviet Union. He was the first, but unfortunately not the last, journalist to be similarly executed:

- On October 17, 1994, almost one year to the day after Lingys's death, another investigative journalist, a twenty-seven-year-old Russian named Dmitry Kholodov, of the *Moskovski Komsomolets*, known for his reports on corruption and graft in the Russian army, was killed when he opened a briefcase containing a bomb.

- Seven days after that, Khamidjon Khakimov, the thirty-year-old editor of an Uzbek-language newspaper in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, another former Soviet republic, was shot in the head.

- And on March 1, a popular and powerful television journalist, Vladislav Listyev, who had recently been named executive director of Ostankino, Russia's public television network, was shot to death outside his Moscow apartment. The case remains unsolved, but a mob hit is a strong working theory.

The reaction to Lingys's murder at *Respublika*, meanwhile, provides an unusual window into journalism these days in Eastern Europe. If the paper's coverage of local underworld activities had been active before his murder, after the murder it became a crusade for editor-in-chief Vitas Tomkus. Streetwise and clever, Tomkus, known for his signature black-leather jacket and omnipresent cigarette, was the closest thing to an investigative reporter that Lithuania had in her last days as a Soviet republic.

Respublika bears his stamp. It is sassy, irreverent, and funny — but also often in poor taste. While many read-

Lingys was my best friend," he says. The slain journalist's black-and-white photo portrait hangs above his



ers chuckle over not-so-subtle jibes at the political leadership, others are outraged by *Respublika*'s insensitivities to various individuals or religious, political, social, or ethnic groups. Journalist

Daiva Vilkeltyte wrote, in a rival publication last year, that "for all its journalistic resources, and undeniable zip and punch, *Respublika* is arguably a corrosive, rather than positive, influence on the public life of the newly reborn state."

Tomkus makes it clear that in the Lingys case, personal loyalties propelled journalistic action. "For five years,

desk, dried flowers tucked behind the frame.

After the Lingys killing, Tomkus created a four-man team of reporters, all in their twenties — among them, Lingys's younger brother,

Audrius — to investigate the murder. The team has been aided by its ties to the Lithuanian prosecutor's office, coincidentally and conveniently housed right next door to the paper on a side street in downtown Vilnius.

Journalist Vilkeltyte also criticized *Respublika*'s handling of

the murder investigation, writing that "the methods used in reporting organized

crime are questionable. Documents from the Interior Ministry and prosecutor's office are leaked with remarkable frequency and little complaint. No sooner is a serious crime committed than *Respublika* has named the guilty party, long before the tedious judicial process has begun. After Lingys's murder, it was *Respublika*, not the authorities, who named the alleged killers and then, in an epic nineteen-part series, gave minute 'details' of the crime's planning and execution, concluding with a demand for the death penalty for the assassins."

Tomkus admits violating "canons of journalism" by, for example, publishing information that "wasn't always checked." Defense attorneys for Boris Dekanidze, accused of ordering the murder, and for the two confessed hitmen in the case blamed the paper in part for a lynch mob atmosphere at the trial last October. Nonetheless, all are in prison.

Tomkus worries now that the post-trial period is dangerous for his reporters, and they agree. Several have moved their families into hiding. "We live in fear all the time," says Virginijus Gaivenis, who headed the team. "A bomb can be placed in your car. At night you wake up from nightmares." And Gaivenis knows he is not the only investigative journalist in Eastern Europe these days who goes to sleep with a loaded pistol next to his bed.

Ina Navazelskis

Navazelskis is director of regional media programs for the Soros Foundation's Open Society Institute.

ILLUSTRATION BY MARCELLUS HALL

SOUNDBITE

"Wired's vision of the good life is impressively consistent: money, power, and a Game Boy sewn into the palm of your hand. Equally consistent is the absence of any serious consideration of the problems that come with business control of information technology."

Keith White in "The Killer App: Wired Magazine, Voice of the Corporate Revolution," in *Baffler* magazine, issue number six.

FOLLOW-UP

cable: who's connected?

Even before they've reached the nation's cable boxes, the partisan political channels (see "I'm Not a Reporter, But I Play One On GOP-TV," *CJR*, September/October 1994) are causing controversy. This past January, the nation's largest cable operator, Tele-Communications, Inc., announced plans to offer a package of political channels to its 12 million cable subscribers by the end of 1996. Among the likely channels: National Empowerment Television, a twenty-four-hour conservative channel best known for carrying Newt Gingrich's *Progress Report*, which already has its

affiliation agreement with TCI; and the Conservative Television Network, planned by Republican strategist Anthony Fabrizio.

The conservative nature of these channels has raised the ire of The '90s Channel, the nation's leading liberal cable outfit. While his ideological opposites are granted the promise of a national audience, '90s Channel president John Schwartz says TCI has actively shut his channel out, raising leased access rates on the seven local systems that now carry it, and excluding it from the political package. "TCI has never invited us to be part of their political package," Schwartz says. "It looks like we don't fit in with what they want to program."

"The marketplace is the marketplace," responds TCI vice president Robert

Thomson, who explains that the present package lineup, while predominantly conservative, represents simply those channels that have demonstrated the necessary financial and technical wherewithal. "We need to be sure that the channels, even if they don't start with twenty-four hours of programming, have the means to do so in a reasonable time," Thomson says. "We don't see the '90s Channel as likely to develop broad appeal." Still, Thomson says that in the name of ideological equality, TCI has "offered some limited financial assistance . . . to Democratic members of Congress and party officials" who have shown interest in creating their own version of NET and CTN.

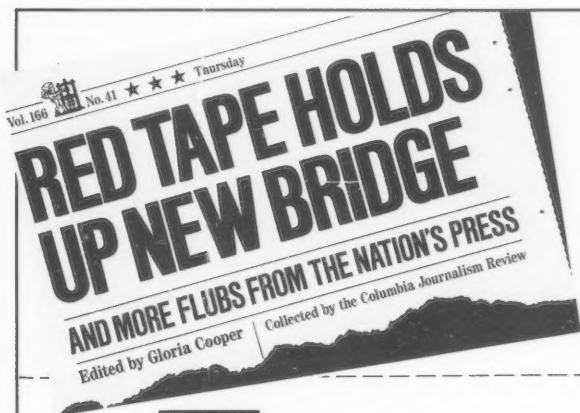
According to Andrew Schwartzman of the nonpar-

tisan Media Access Project, this concern with cash flow is precisely the criterion that makes conservative channels more likely to thrive than more liberal ones. "The business community has a natural alliance with a channel that's going to promote a flat tax or deregulation," Schwartzman says.

With TCI's package set to debut on a limited basis before the 1996 elections, the '90s Channel has little time to raise money to meet TCI's standards. "If TCI would offer us inclusion in the package first," Schwartz notes, "we'd have a tremendous advantage in raising the cash to go full time and meet their criteria. But that's a vicious circle."

Thomas Goetz

Goetz is a New York writer.



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Darts & Laurels

◆ **LAUREL** (in hindsight, alas) to the Anti-Defamation League, for an investigative midnight ride. On October 27, months before the grievous bombing on the nineteenth of April in Oklahoma City, the ADL sent to the national news desks of the all the major dailies, newsweeklies, and broadcast networks its double-barreled report "Armed and Dangerous: Militias Take Aim at the Federal Government." Drawing on evidence collected by the fact-finding department of the organization's civil rights division, the report revealed that right-wing paramilitary groups around the country, disturbed by gun control and brooding over the government's handling of the Branch Davidian and Randy Weaver episodes, were not only preaching the usual tiresome anti-semitism, racism, and Christian supremacy, but also laying the groundwork for massive armed resistance and terrorist actions in furtherance of their goals. Details of the findings, summarized state by state and naming names, made it frighteningly clear that the report did not exaggerate when it described the situation as "combustible." And indeed, many listened and helped spread the alarm: in subsequent weeks *The Columbus Dispatch*, *The New York Times*, the *Philadelphia Daily News*, the *Houston Chronicle*, the *Dayton Daily News*, the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *USA Today*, *The Times Herald Record* of Middletown, New York — and *Donahue* — all carried stories related to the ADL report. Many others, however, chose not to hear, including, most conspicuously, all the national networks, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Washington Post*.

◆ **DART** to KMJ, Fresno, California, home to Rush Limbaugh's syndicated morning radio talk show, for beclouding the news. When weatherman Sean Boyd began predicting rain for the day of the second annual KMJ-sponsored barbeque and picnic in honor of the conservative commentator, his bosses high-pressured him to put more sunshine in the forecast lest supporters stay away from the profitable event; when he refused, he later told *The Fresno Bee*, they threw him out in the cold. What's more, Boyd recalled, it wasn't the first such attempted news-twister: a month or so before, when he had predicted "partly cloudy skies, breezy and

cool with highs in the upper 50s and 60s" for the day of a KMJ-sponsored golf tournament, program director John Broeske had suggested that "mostly sunny with a high near 70" would be a whole lot better. (The *Bee* also reported Boyd's bosses' denials that anyone had ever suggested such a thing. They couldn't, however, deny that their ousted weatherman had been at least meteorologically correct: during the Al Gore Tree-Hugging Contest, it started to drizzle, and by the time the Miss Dittohead Swimsuit competition got under way it was raining quite liberally indeed.)

◆ **DART** to the *Gloucester County Times*, Woodbury, New Jersey, for marked-down news. When the ad department couldn't sell the news department on a story about the twentieth anniversary of the John Wanamaker department store in the local mall — an advertiser the paper had only recently snagged — publisher Wayne Studer charged in. Studer had a reporter sent to cover the event, then ordered that the detailed account, complete with four-color photo, be showcased on the paper's front page.

◆ **DART** to Russ Brown, sports reporter for the *Louisville Courier-Journal*, for playing on too many teams. While covering the University of Louisville athletics beat, Brown has also been working as a representative of Excel Telecommunications, a privately held Dallas-based long-distance telephone-time wholesaler whose "multi-level marketing concept" — i.e., paying people commissions on sales made by others they bring into the organization — is, with its almost too easy and good-to-be-true profits, sweeping the coaching community. Not only are the U of L basketball coach, assistant basketball coach, sports information director, and assistant sports information director fellow Excel reps, but Brown has also signed up at least one member of the U of L athletics staff for Excel and solicited another. According to press reports in the *Courier-Journal* and elsewhere, Brown has denied that his Excel activities present a potential conflict of interest, has refused to give them up because they are so lucrative, and has accepted reassignment to Western Kentucky University in the Sun Belt Conference. Considering the recent cheerleading series on Excel in the

Lexington Herald-Leader, making admiring points about all those enviable seven-figure incomes practically falling into the baskets of moonlighting coaches in Kentucky and beyond, it's hard to see how an away-from-home assignment could prove to be anything less than a field day for the *Courier-Journal's* — and Excel's — Brown.

◆ **DART** to *The Wall Street Journal*, for showing why the credibility of journalists isn't a whole lot higher than the credibility of car salesmen. At a March 9 breakfast held at Chicago's Hotel Inter-Continental and jointly sponsored, as the invitation to subscribers phrased it, "by *The Wall Street Journal* and Lincoln Mercury, a Division of Ford Motor Corporation," the featured guest was "Mr. Tim Schellhardt, Chicago Bureau Chief." Also "on display," as the invitation promised, was "the all-new 1995 Lincoln Continental," along with a company representative to answer questions about the car.

◆ **LAUREL** to WCBS-TV, New York City, and reporter Marcia Kramer, for "Flunking Lunch," an under-the-table investigation into some of the less than savory aspects of the city's school lunch program. A mix of interviews with disgusted cafeteria workers, complaints from sickened students, and hidden-camera footage of crate upon crate of foodstuffs delivered to lunchrooms months and even years past their shelf-life expiration dates, the series served up plenty of food for thought. For his part, Chancellor Ramon Cortines, apparently blessed with a cast-iron stomach, refused to concede that Kramer's stories of mysteriously colored ice cream, moldy cheese, smelly meat, and mice-infested turkeys had any substance at all. After the series aired, however, the chancellor ordered a cleanup of the system's food service practices and vowed never to let outdated food into the lunchrooms again.

◆ **DART** to the New York City news media, for a case of aggravated assault. Tipped by cops in the city's 20th Precinct that its Special Crime Victims Squad had earlier that evening taken into custody one Mark Gardy, a thirty-four-year-old second-year medical resident then on duty in the St. Luke's-Roosevelt Hospital emergency room, on charges of sexual abuse brought by a twenty-five-year-old woman he had treated for a migraine headache in the E.R. four weeks before, the media didn't look a gift story in the mouth. When, at midnight, the strip-searched, i.d.'d, and fingerprinted Gardy, still clad in blue surgical scrubsuit, hands shackled behind his back, and flanked by three officers, made the humiliating "perp walk" to Central Booking, the media, lights ablaze and cameras rolling, were at the ready, thanks to the publicity-hungry cops, to capture it all on film and — the obligatory "allegeds" notwithstanding — to

subliminally testify to Gardy's guilt. WABC, for example, captioned its segment "Rx for Trouble," quoted the police as saying that the doctor practiced "medicine and molestation," and interviewed an "area resident" who asserted that "I would probably not use the emergency room after that." On WPIX, a paramedic was permitted to assert that "I could not feel right bringing my patients here knowing what has happened"; in another interview, an outpatient who lamented that "It's really bad," got this sympathetic response from the reporter: "Especially for a doctor." In the *New York Post* account, the unidentified accuser became, unambiguously, "the victim." Apparently no one thought to ask the district attorney the obvious question of how justice would be gained by such an obviously staged arrest (in fact, the d.a. had *not* authorized the arrest); while, at the same time, few could resist that intensely dramatic footage (which, as it happened, turned up later that night on the TV screen of the lockup shared by Gardy and scores of other prisoners, causing officials to place him in isolation for his own protection). Throughout the next day, the footage was shown again and again — and, two weeks later, yet again, when those same New York media dutifully reported on the district attorney's announcement: the doctor was exonerated, his accuser had "incorrectly perceived some events." The unauthorized arrest, the d.a.'s office acknowledged, should never have been made. Just why it had been made is a story no one has cared to pursue.

◆ **DART** to the National Magazine Awards, for rewarding a dubious achievement. So dazzled were the judges by the revelation that, for her *New Republic* articles on the Clinton health care reform plan, Elizabeth McCaughey had actually, as the ceremonial citation put it, "waded through the plan's 1,364 pages," and so awed by the power of her magazine prose — "more than any other single event in the debate, what she wrote stopped the bill in its intellectual tracks" — that they bestowed on her work an award for "journalism in the public interest." The judges apparently were unconcerned with such inconvenient questions as whether that prodigious feat of reading included accurate comprehension and exactly how the public interest was served by the railroading of the plan. They also seemed unconcerned about or oblivious to the fact that McCaughey's findings had been seriously contradicted by several respected critics, among them, James Fallows, who in a 6,000-word piece in the January *Atlantic* had shown her key and most alarming assertion — that buying coverage or treatment outside the plan would be virtually impossible — was "simply false."

This column is compiled and written by Gloria Cooper, CJR's managing editor, to whom nominations should be addressed.

1994 John Swett Awards for Media Excellence

The California Teachers Association is proud to honor the winners of the 1994 John Swett Awards for Media Excellence. The John Swett Awards recognize individual journalists, publications and stations for their dedication to excellence in covering education.

Newspapers

Metropolitan Daily

Coverage of School/Education
Stephanie Chavez,
Los Angeles Times
Series on a Single Subject/Theme
Kimberly Kindy,
Daily News of Los Angeles
Continuous Coverage
Sacramento Bee
Editorials
Los Angeles Times
Series by a Publication
San Francisco Examiner

Community Daily

Coverage of School/Education
Rick Redding,
The News-Pilot, San Pedro
Roberta Westerfield,
The Bakersfield Californian
Series on a Single Subject/Theme
Jane Rosenberg and Marie Montgomery,
The Torrance Daily Breeze
A Feature Story
Rick Redding,
The News-Pilot, San Pedro
Continuous Coverage
The Daily Democrat, Woodland

Weekly/Semi-Weekly

Coverage of Schools/Education
Patrick Larkin,
Irvine World News

Continuous Coverage
Irvine World News

* * * * *

Television

Individual Contribution
Terry Burhans,
KUSI-TV, San Diego
Locally Produced Program/Series
KPWB-TV, Sacramento

Radio

Individual Contribution
Cheryl Colopy,
*National Public Radio/
Pacifica Network News*

D.A. ("Del") Weber, President ♦ Ron McPeck, Vice President ♦ Lois Tinson, Secretary-Treasurer
Carolyn Doggett, Executive Director ♦ Ned Hopkins, Associate Executive Director
Tommye Hutto, Manager, Communications ♦ Sandra Jackson, Media Consultant
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HEARST NEWSPAPERS' 1995 EAGLE AWARD WINNERS



Talib Amir
City Editor
Laredo Morning Times



David Bauerlein
Assistant City Editor
Beaumont Enterprise



Chris Beringer-Neyens
Arts & Entertainment
Editor
Seattle Post-Intelligencer



Dan Cook, Jr.
Sports Editor/Columnist
San Antonio Express-News



Dave Einsel
Assistant Director
of Photography
Houston Chronicle



Waldo Esperat
Systems Manager
Beaumont Enterprise



Katie Harrison
Office/Systems Manager
Washington, DC, Bureau



Charlie Hug
Advertising Systems
Director
Albany Times Union



Kevin Lewis
Sports Editor
Plainview Daily Herald



Justin Makler
Systems Manager
Edwardsville Intelligencer



Judy Meno
Director, Creative
Services & Advertising
Production
Midland Daily News



Gene Mills
Information Systems
Manager
Midland Reporter-Telegram



David O'Neill
Assistant Production
Manager
San Antonio Express-News



Katherine H. Rabin
Business Editor
San Francisco Examiner



Adriana Rodriguez
Classified Inside
Sales Manager
Laredo Morning Times



Gail Soper
Circulation Clerk
Huron Daily Tribune



Michael Spain
Assistant Managing
Editor - Systems
Albany Times Union



John Telfer, II
Editor
Midland Daily News



Grey Townsend
Regional Sales Manager
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Dan West
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Houston Chronicle



Terry Williamson
Sports Writer
Midland Reporter-Telegram

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 **Hearst Newspapers**

PLAGIARIZE, PLAGIARIZE, PLAGIARIZE

● ● ● only be sure to always call it research

by Trudy Lieberman

*"Plagiarize!
Let no one else's work evade your eyes.
Remember why the good lord made
your eyes.
So don't change your eyes,
But plagiarize, plagiarize, plagiarize.
Only be sure to always — to call it,
please — research."
Lobachevsky, a song by Tom Lehrer.*

Last fall Susan Youngwood, an adjunct journalism instructor at St. Michael's College, a small liberal arts school near Burlington, Vermont, phoned the offices of CJR to pose a question. For an exercise in covering speeches, she had asked her students to listen to John F. Kennedy's inaugural address and write a story about it. The sixteen students, mostly sophomores, complied with the assignment. However, two students, acting independently, took a

short cut, plagiarized *The New York Times's* account of Kennedy's speech, and submitted the *Times's* words as their own.

The students received an F for the course, the maximum penalty the journalism department demands. (One student, however, appealed, and the punishment was rescinded.) But Youngwood wanted more. She wanted examples that told her students why plagiarism was bad, and looked to CJR for guidance. "I was curious about what happens on a professional level," she said. "If I'm caught plagiarizing, what happens?"

Her question was intriguing. But the answers, like so many, are not a crisp black or white. Their tones of gray

Trudy Lieberman is a contributing editor of CJR. She is a senior editor at Consumer Reports. This article reflects her conclusions, not those of Consumer Reports.

mirror the ambivalence society accords dozens of other transgressions. To be sure, most writers and editors still regard plagiarism as a journalistic evil — the profession's cardinal sin. Editors talk convincingly about the covenants of trust and credibility that are severed when a reporter or columnist takes another's words and falsely passes them off as his or her own. "This is something you never, never do," says James Fallows, Washington editor of *The Atlantic Monthly*. "Every line of work needs clear rules. If you're a soldier, you don't desert. If you're a writer, you don't steal anyone's prose. It should be the one automatic firing."

But it is not. Punishment is uneven, ranging from severe to virtually nothing even for major offenses. The sin itself carries neither public humiliation nor the mark of Cain. Some editors will keep a plagiarist on staff or will knowingly hire one if talent outweighs the infraction.

If convicted Watergate burglar G. Gordon Liddy can metamorphose into a talk show host with a band of admiring followers and Richard Nixon can go to his grave a respected elder statesman, it's hardly surprising that journalists who commit plagiarism can continue their careers at the same publication or move on to some loftier endeavor.

A classic example is Nina Totenberg, the well-known, enterprising reporter for National Public Radio who has made a name for herself disclosing Washington's dirty secrets. Totenberg was fired for plagiarism when she worked as a staff writer for the now-defunct *National Observer*, a fact disclosed by Al Hunt in a *Wall Street Journal* column during the Clarence Thomas hearings some twenty years later. In 1972, Totenberg simply took several paragraphs and verbatim quotes from a *Washington Post* report about former House Speaker Thomas P. O'Neill, who was about to become majority leader, and dropped them into her own story about him, without attributing a single word to the *Post*. "I was in a hurry. I used terrible judg-

ment," she told *CJR*. "The fact I used so many direct quotes obligated me morally to credit the *Post*. I should have been punished. I have a strong feeling that a young reporter is entitled to one mistake and to have the holy bejeezus scared out of her to never do it again."

Pursuing an answer to Susan Youngwood's question, *CJR* looked at twenty newspaper and magazine plagiarism cases that have surfaced since 1988. Eight reporters were fired. Two of them were rehired after Newspaper Guild arbitrations, and the rest have secured new positions, some in journalism. Three of the twenty were sus-

Punishment is uneven, ranging from severe to virtually nothing, even for major offenses

pending for varying lengths of time; one had his column suspended for a brief period; one had his column discontinued but kept his job; one resigned and was offered another job at the same organization; one left the paper before his plagiarism was discovered, and the remaining five were not punished.

Here's what has happened to some of the journalists who got caught:

- Mark Hornung, editorial page editor for the *Chicago Sun-Times*, resigned in March after he admitted lifting twelve paragraphs nearly verbatim from a *Washington Post* editorial on the balanced budget amendment

and dropping them into his own fifteen-paragraph piece on the subject. The *Sun-Times* offered him a position in the circulation department, where he currently works.

- Ken Hamblin, a *Denver Post* columnist who also syndicates a national column through the New York Times Syndicate and a radio talk show through the Entertainment Radio Network, was suspended for two months last year by the *Post* after he plagiarized five paragraphs, almost word for word, from a news story published around the same time in the rival *Rocky Mountain News*. During Hamblin's suspension, numerous media outlets continued to carry his column and talk show. He remains a popular journalist in conservative circles, and shortly after his suspension was a luncheon guest at the Heritage Foundation.

- In 1989 Bob Hepburn, Washington bureau chief for the *Toronto Star*, plagiarized three paragraphs, changing only one word, from a *Washington Monthly* story (on the newsstands at the time) about decrepit city services in Washington, and used them in his column about D.C. Mayor Marion Barry. Four months later, after the *Washington Monthly* made a public issue of the theft, the *Star* discontinued his column, but he continued on as bureau chief. He is currently on leave from his position as head of the *Star's* Mideast bureau.

- Michael Kramer, chief political correspondent for *Time*, took a sentence from a *Los Angeles Times* piece by the lawyers Charles Fried and Alan Dershowitz, altered it slightly, and used it as an unattributed fillip to a 1992 column about Ross Perot. *Time* and Kramer apologized to readers, and Kramer sent a separate letter of apology to Fried, but he received no punishment and is still the magazine's political columnist.

- Edwin Chen, Washington reporter for the *Los Angeles Times*, wrote a book in 1992 called *Cheating Death*, a nonfiction crime thriller about a

doctor and an insurance scam. Chen based his book largely on reporting done a few years earlier for a story in *Vanity Fair* by contributing editor Ann Louise Bardach. Chen's prose included more than forty passages that closely resembled Bardach's piece, and created the erroneous impression that he had done substantial reporting for the book. Chen is still writing for the *Times* and was awarded the prestigious assignment of covering the health care debate over the past two years.

● Fox Butterfield, Boston bureau chief for *The New York Times*, took five paragraphs from a *Boston Globe* story about, ironically, plagiarism committed in a commencement address by H. Joachim Maitre, Boston University's dean of the College of Communications. Butterfield's prose was very similar to the *Globe's*; a few words were changed, a few rearranged. Butterfield got a one-week suspension and remained the bureau chief.

● Bob Morris was a columnist for *The Orlando Sentinel*. In early 1994, he left the paper to try new ventures unrelated to journalism. A year later, the *Sentinel* discovered that Morris had written a column for the paper in October 1993 that was essentially the same as one published eleven years earlier by Mike Harden, a columnist for the now-defunct Columbus, Ohio, *Citizen-Journal*. The *Sentinel* column, which was subsequently reprinted in *Reader's Digest*, contained a number of sentences that were nearly identical to the earlier work.

Punishment was moot since Morris was no longer on the *Sentinel* staff. But the paper published an apology to its readers and made a cash settlement to Harden, now at *The Columbus Dispatch*. Morris remains a journalistic presence in Orlando. He is listed as editor-at-large on the masthead of the monthly magazine *Orlando*, and self-syndicates a column on Florida life to several local newspapers. Last year one of them, *The Leesburg Daily Commercial*, found Morris's column such a valu-

able commodity that the paper promoted it on billboards in the area.

● Gregory Freeman, a columnist for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, took three sentences from a *Boston Globe* column by Derrick Z. Jackson and used them in his own piece about controversial Clinton nominee Lani Guinier in 1993. His column was suspended for a month, but he remained on the staff, taking what the paper said was a "previously scheduled vacation." He continues to write political and social commentary for the *Post-Dispatch*.

Is plagiarism the theft of an idea, one word, four sentences, five paragraphs, or simply the research of others?

● Laura Parker was *The Washington Post's* Miami bureau chief when she was fired in 1991 for inserting quotes from people she did not interview into her story about Florida's mosquito and grasshopper infestation; the quotes came from *Miami Herald* and AP reporting. Today she covers the environment in the Washington bureau of *The Detroit News* and was seated at the head table during a National Press Club luncheon commemorating the twenty-fifth anniversary of Earth Day.

The token punishment and lack of stigma attached to plagiarism flow in

part from the profession's inability to define exactly what it is. Webster's Third New International is clear — to plagiarize is "to steal and pass off as one's own (the ideas or words of another): use (a created production) without crediting the source . . ." But that definition stretches around a mountain of sins. Is plagiarism the theft of an idea, one word, two words, three words, four sentences, five paragraphs, long passages, or simply the research of others boiled down to yours? Is it a rearrangement of another's words and thoughts, or a near verbatim match with a different word substituted here and there?

Legal precedent isn't much help. Plagiarism is not a legal term of art. Its close cousin, copyright infringement, occurs if a work created by someone is substantially similar to a pre-existing work, and there's evidence that the person had access to the earlier version. That standard, too, leaves a lot of wiggle room, and there are thousands of cases interpreting the language. Very few instances of newspaper and magazine plagiarism ever come to court since copyright cases are expensive and little money is usually at stake. *Vanity Fair* writer Ann Louise Bardach did sue Edwin Chen and his publisher, and ended up with a \$25,000 settlement, out of which she had to cover some \$9,000 in attorneys' fees.

"I don't think there's anything like a misdemeanor," says *Denver Post* editorial page editor Chuck Green. "All plagiarism is felonious, but there are degrees of felonies." Walker Lundy, editor of the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, also makes a distinction. "There is a difference between stealing an entire column or story and stealing a phrase. Should there be a difference in the sanctions? I don't know."

Many publications have no written policies on plagiarism, and the codes of ethics developed by professional societies are imprecise or silent. The Society of Professional Journalists notes in its code that "plagiarism is dishonest and unacceptable." The newly adopted

Statement of Ethical Principles for the Associated Press Managing Editors simply says "the newspaper should not plagiarize words or images." The old code of ethics said nothing. The statement of principles from the American Society of Newspaper Editors doesn't mention plagiarism, and the American Society of Magazine Editors has neither a code of ethics nor a statement of principles on the subject.

In the absence of any industry-wide guidelines, editors are pretty much on their own to judge the offense and punish it as they wish. Some may use it to get rid of a reporter they don't like, or others may bend over backwards to retain a valued staff member. (Some employers may use a plagiarism charge as an excuse to fire a reporter, says Newspaper Guild president Charles Dale. But before proceeding to arbitration "the local would make a decision based on the facts, merits, and justice involved.") Former *Washington Post* editor Benjamin Bradlee takes a hard line: "If you plagiarize, you should be terminated," he says. "An argument can be made that if you don't terminate someone, you can be stopped from firing the next person who does it." Not only did the *Post* fire Laura Parker, but Bradlee says the *Post* also refused to hire Elizabeth Wurtzel, a young writer who plagiarized some material for a story in *The Dallas Morning News*. Her stolen words were discovered, the piece was never published, and she was fired. *The New Yorker* and *New York*, however, later hired her to write about pop music.

Other editors are more willing to tailor the punishment to fit the gravity of the offense, an approach that results in what can appear to be uneven treatment sometimes at the same publication. *The Denver Post* suspended Ken Hamblin, but summarily fired art critic Irene Rawlings several years earlier when the paper discovered she had managed to typeset her by-line over two articles from *The New Yorker* and claim them as her own. However, Green says, "it would not have taken much more to push the

Hamblin case to the capital offense category. A couple more paragraphs or another instance of the same proportion, and he'd have been gone."

Some editors may wait until the second offense or a repeated pattern of theft appears before dismissing a writer. In late 1990, the *Toronto Globe and Mail* suspended Deirdre Kelly, the paper's dance critic, for borrowing sentences and phrases from an article in *Music Magazine*. An arbitration panel in a proceeding brought by the Southern Ontario Newspaper Guild reduced her suspension from three weeks to one. A few months later the paper fired Kelly for

Writers who plagiarize tend to do it more than once, and break other literary rules as well

another incident in which she copied a fourteen-word phrase from *Maclean's* to describe a figure-skating maneuver. The paper rehired her after another Guild arbitration was decided in Kelly's favor.

Sacramento Bee editor Gregory Favre fired TV columnist Bob Wisheart the second time he plagiarized. For the first offense, Wisheart got a five-month suspension even though his plagiarism involved hundreds of words taken from Stephen King's book *Danse Macabre* for a television column about horror shows. "I don't believe one offense is worth destroying peoples' lives

and careers," Favre said. "The second time the institution of the newspaper was damaged. The integrity of the newspaper was more important than any individual." He added that Wisheart "is an extraordinarily talented young man" whose "original work was better than what he copied."

And therein lies one of the ironies of plagiarism. Many writers who borrow from others are talented in their own right and have no need to steal. "You cannot escape the conclusion there's a psychological dimension to it," says Thomas Mallon, literary editor for *GQ* and author of *Stolen Words*, a book about plagiarism. (Wisheart, for example, landed in a mental hospital after he was fired and recently wrote a remorseful account of his experience for the *Sacramento News & Review*.)

Peter Shaw, who wrote a probing piece on "Plagiary" for *The American Scholar* in 1982, points out that writers who plagiarize tend to do it more than once and sometimes break other literary rules as well. Indeed that was the case in some of the incidents *CJR* examined. Shaw also notes that plagiarism most closely resembles kleptomania in that the stolen passages may not be needed and the person taking them has a wish to be caught.

It is another irony that many incidents involve columnists and critics, writers who above all others are supposed to supply their own literary voices that readers expect to hear. Perhaps this is because words have become a commodity, suggests Lewis Lapham, editor of *Harper's*. "As journalists come to be more like politicians, their work is interchangeable, and the individual voice is harder and harder to find," he says. "It's a gradual debasement of the written word."

Plagiarism, too, may be part of an evolving journalistic culture that has come to rely heavily on borrowing and quoting from other publications as a substitute for original research. Reporters also tend to use the same sources who offer the same pithy quote or put the same spin on an issue. When that happens, ownership

of the words is less clear. Some editors further muddy authorship of a piece by patching paragraphs from wire services into bylined articles. Electronic technology also makes it easy for, say, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* to use paragraphs from the *San Jose Mercury News*, something that would have been much harder to do before computers. In other words, a lot of unattributed material makes its way into the news but may never be considered plagiarism unless some sharp-eyed reader or an aggrieved media organization spots the similarities.

When journalists do get caught, their acts of contrition are the apologies they offer. Invariably they are confessions of mistakes that were unintentional, accidental, sloppy, or inadvertent. Ruth Shalit, an associate editor at *The New Republic*, told CJR that her use of several nearly verbatim passages from a story in the *Legal Times* about a Justice Department attorney was the result of an electronic fumble in which material from one computer screen flashed to another simply with the touch of a key. Bob Hepburn told his readers "I simply forgot where I got the actual wording." Mark Hornung blamed "deadline pressures" and "writer's block." Michael Kramer excused his error with a compliment to the author of the appropriated passage, saying "your felicitous phrase clearly stuck in my mind."

Accidental copying can happen, of course, but a publication's fact-checking procedures ought to kick in sooner or later. In any case, transferring information from one document to another requires several steps that should warn a writer that attribution is in order. "There just isn't a very good excuse for it," says GQ's Mallon.

If writers can glibly explain away their sins, some publications also softened the offense by cloaking it in euphemisms, appearing to avoid responsibility altogether — a problem Mallon found in academic plagiarism as well. Editors' Notes, for instance, often avoid the "P" word. *Time* called the Michael Kramer incident a

"regrettable lapse." The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, in revealing that one of its writers, Renee Stovsky, had used four paragraphs from the *San Jose Mercury News*, noted that the paper "does not condone the improper appropriation of the work of others." *The New York Times* said that Fox Butterfield's report was "improperly dependent" on *The Boston Globe*. *The New Republic* noted that material in Ruth Shalit's article "was not attributed" and that "Shalit acknowledges her debt." The *Rocky Mountain News* didn't run an Editor's Note when it fired rock music critic Justin Mitchell (for what editor Jay Ambrose says

It may be part of a culture that has come to rely heavily on borrowing and quoting from other publications

were a "number of instances" of borrowing sentences and paragraphs) because editors were awaiting the outcome of a Newspaper Guild arbitration, which ultimately went against the *News*. (Mitchell is currently a features copy editor at the paper.)

The Sacramento Bee and *The Orlando Sentinel* were more direct with their readers. The first time *The Sacramento Bee* disciplined Bob Wisehart, it used the word "plagiarize" in its public statements; the second time it told readers "a critical ethical mistake has been made." The *Sentinel* called Bob Morris's theft an "egregious act."

Still, some publications are loath to discuss plagiarism in public. The *Chicago Sun-Times* refused to talk to CJR. "We really don't discuss personnel matters here," explained Penny Williams-Martin, an assistant to the editor. The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* refused to discuss the punishment it gave Renee Stovsky, who is currently a staff writer in the paper's feature department. "I'm not going to tell you what specifically happened to her," said *Post-Dispatch* editor William Woo. "There was internal action taken. We take internal actions on a wide variety of matters that have to do with how well men and women do their jobs. They are between us and their personnel file. They are not between us and our readers or the readers of another publication." Scott Shuger, a free-lance writer who has written about the Chen case, said that eleven newspapers and magazines (CJR was not among them) rejected his story before he found a home for it in *Forbes MediaCritic*. "It was considered inside baseball," Shuger recalls. "There's an unstated reciprocity agreement. You don't write about my plagiarism. I don't write about yours."

This "circle-the-wagons" mentality is as inexcusable as plagiarism itself, given what journalists do. Reporters didn't think twice about holding Senator Joseph Biden to the highest standard of honesty when they revealed that he had plagiarized material for a campaign speech, a story that helped drive him out of the 1988 presidential race.

Indeed, the APME Statement of Ethical Principles says a newspaper "should report matters regarding itself or its personnel with the same vigor and candor as it would other institutions and individuals."

If journalists are to gain (or regain) credibility, the profession's response to its own transgressions has to be commensurate with the outrage expressed when another profession fails to police itself; it cannot simply mirror the frayed ethical code society has come to accept. Perhaps then there will be a more satisfactory answer to Susan Youngwood's question. ♦

HAITI

LETTER FROM

by Bob Shacochis

It was, and still is, unpaved, unmarked, and cratered with potholes, Haiti's seemingly endless road to democracy, and its manifest of casualties has been extensive. Eventually every traveler navigating its hazardous course has crashed, turned around, or broken down, however temporarily, and in that sense, at least, it's been the same road for everybody, including the foreign and domestic press. The same

challenge. The same opportunity. What one might euphemistically call a learning experience.

Which is why I could imagine the several dozen Haitian journalists asking themselves what they were doing last March as they boarded a plane in Port-au-Prince that would take them to a professional seminar in Miami. What more might they conceivably have left to learn from the American media? It would have been a fair question, considering that the two press corps had worked shoulder to shoulder for almost a decade; that Haitian journalists had played a key and historic role in the reinvention of their country's political landscape; and, finally, that you didn't need to poll many of them to start your own collection of anecdotes illustrating a pattern of transgressions, great and small, committed by their otherwise well-intentioned counterparts from the colossus to the north.

Among those flying into Miami were representatives of Port-au-Prince's three most popular and influential commercial radio stations (radio being the medium of choice in Haiti, where almost everyone is poor and illiterate). Radio Quisqueya, Radio Tropic FM, and Radio Metropole have distinct, yet converging, identities. Left-of-center Quisqueya scrapes by, proud of its

activist heritage. The liberal Tropic FM, owned and operated by a husband-wife team who spent much of their adult lives in New York, is solvent, floating on the audience it built during the years when General Raoul Cédras's junta was in power (1991-94), when Quisqueya was mostly off the air. Metropole finesses the most lucrative advertising accounts, because of its ability to span the chasms between Haiti's socio-economic classes. Radical, middle of the road, bourgeois, is how the stations tend to describe each other, although they all share the common cause of a free and democratic Haiti and a history of death threats and harassment during Cédras's regime.

Last summer, when *U.S. News & World Report* published an invasion map showing one station targeted, the rest assumed their mountaintop antennae would also be demolished a la Grenada. They were all accused by the de facto minister of information of "scandalous and provocative behavior"

*Bob Shacochis has been covering Haiti as a journalist since 1986 and is currently completing a book about the U.S. intervention there. His latest work of Caribbean-centered fiction is *Swimming in the Volcano*. His novel *Easy in the Islands* won a National Book Award for fiction in 1985.*

when they went, an alarmed contingent of station owners and directors, to the United States Information Service to offer to cut their own wires, anything, to be spared destruction.

Currently Radio Quisqueya rules the audience, if not the marketplace, largely because of its resonant history and the long-standing and unrepentant militancy of its founders, Lilyanne Pierre-Paul and Sonny Marvel, who are understandably ambivalent about their celebrity (see "Local Heros," *CJR*, May/June 1992). "I've been hiding all my life," Pierre-Paul told me in February when I visited the station's carefully guarded offices in a decrepit building in downtown Port-au-Prince.

At the zenith of Jean-Claude Duvalier's dictatorship in the late '70s, when Pierre-Paul started her career, "we used the technology of the transistor, and the introduction of Creole [a Franco-African polyglot, the language of Haiti's masses] onto the airwaves," she recalled, "to make a cultural and political revolution in our country." Until that time, 100 percent of Haitian programming had been in French, the polarizing language of the ruling class, no matter that barely more than 10 percent of the population spoke or understood it. Then, in a stroke of proselytistic genius, Radio Lumière began broadcasting Baptist sermons in Creole (thousands converted); Radio Haiti-Inter, an independent station, followed suit, transmitting live coverage of soccer matches. Then Radio Soleil, a station owned by the hierarchy of the Catholic church, legitimized through newscasts, commentary, and sermons the everyday use of Creole. The linguistic wall of silence had been breached; soon Haitians were being interviewed on the streets, for the first time their opinions disseminated in a common language, and the Haitian press became the spokesman for Haiti's voiceless millions.

The Duvalierists were not pleased. The minister of defense summoned the press corps to a meeting to complain that he had recently visited the provincial city of Jacmel, where he was astonished to hear a peasant talking about the Shah of Iran. Why should a peasant know so much, the minister demanded. In 1980, Baby Doc retaliated against the innate subversiveness of the transistor radio by unleashing his police chief on the stations. "I had two choices — die, or go into exile," said Pierre-Paul.

After the *Dechoukaj*, or "uprooting," of Duvalier in 1986, she and the others from Radio Haiti-Inter returned from Venezuela and Canada to rebuild the station into a soapbox for the democratic movement. This, in turn, quickly attracted the attention of General Henri Namphy's brutal provisional government. "It was a new experience, a terrible experience," Pierre-Paul recalls. Forced into hiding for the next four years, she moved continuously from one safe house to another.

The Rev. Jean-Bertrand Aristide's election in 1990 brought a brief respite, and a more mundane challenge when the boss of Radio Haiti-Inter, Jean Dominique, fired the staff over what was ostensibly a salary dispute. Renting air time from another station, Pierre-Paul and Marvel launched Radio Quisqueya, a modest event that impropitiously coincided with one of overwhelming magnitude — the overthrow of Aristide. "For seven months," said Pierre-Paul, "we couldn't show ourselves." During the regime's three-year tenure, four journalists were murdered, one disappeared; scores were menaced, beaten, and

arrested, among them Radio Tropic FM's Colson Desamir who, while attempting to report the arrival of U.N. special envoy Dante Caputo, was knocked to the ground by a soldier's rifle, bound, blindfolded, taken into custody and for the next six days incarcerated at the notorious Fort Dimanche. Radio Tropic FM, the only station to broadcast news updates on the half hour, began using the air time to plead for his release, putting his family, friends, and fellow journalists behind the microphone, none of whom could have imagined they were colluding in Desamir's misery. For two days, with the sound of his wife or father crying in the background, or a familiar voice demanding his freedom, the soldiers, with a radio tuned to Tropic FM, would torture him during newscasts, every thirty minutes. His arms still bear the scars of an attempt to chop them off.

In May 1994, despite continuing persecution, even a grenade pitched against the station, Quisqueya was finally back on the air. "We said we are not going to wait for democracy to come to us," Pierre-Paul says. "We're going to go get the democracy for ourselves." Encouraged by Quisqueya's audacity, pro-Aristide crowds gathered at the station throughout the summer leading up to the American intervention, but even with 20,000 U.S. troops on the island, the threats intensified. The city's psychotic police chief, Col. Michel François, vowed to destroy Quisqueya, and the staff shut down the station themselves on September 30 — temporarily. Within days Michel François had fled into exile, and by the new year Pierre-Paul and Marvel had nudged aside their prime competitors, Radio Tropic FM and Radio Metropole.

"We are," Pierre-Paul says with her customary exuberance, "part of the history of this country."

Richard Widmaier of Radio Metropole was also on the plane to Miami. Widmaier had been typecast by the foreign press as the quintessential — and, by implication, morally repugnant — elite bourgeois businessman/media tycoon. At one point during the reign of General Raoul Cédras, who had led a coup d'état against President Aristide in September 1991, a *Miami Herald* reporter — one of the so-called Sunshine Boys, a cadre of correspondents supplied primarily but not exclusively by the *Herald*, *The New York Times*, and the *Los Angeles Times* who practiced what would become known derisively, for its excesses and omissions, as voodoo journalism — solicited Widmaier's opinion on the potential impact of Aristide's return. "If Aristide comes back," Widmaier declared, "it's going to be hell." He paused and then added, "If Aristide doesn't come back, it's going to be hell." The reporter quoted only the first half of Widmaier's statement; the *Herald* printed a retraction after Widmaier objected, but the damage to everyone's credibility was not so readily repaired.

Not bound for the Miami conference, but a victim of a more egregious and, despite its out-of-the-mainstream context, no less revealing encounter, was the Rev. Jean-Yves Urfie, editor of the popular five-year-old weekly *Journal Libéré*, Haiti's only Creole-language newspaper, who was cornered by *Rolling Stone*'s geopolitical mugger, P.J. O'Rourke, in the summer of 1994. "I was printing clandestinely," says the voluble Father Urfie, whose Creole nickname translates as Skin Inside-Out, meaning he wears his heart on his sleeve. "So I explained to

him, 'Please, I'll give you background information but I cannot as such give you an interview and be identified.' You know what he wrote? 'A leftist French priest wearing a Chicago Bulls T-shirt.' In Port-au-Prince you have five French priests, four of them right-wing, and I'm the only one to have a Chicago Bulls T-shirt. That's dirty!" Urfie, round and balding, throws out his arms in disgust. *Libété* lost most of its correspondents, through exile or murder, during the coup d'état, and the kids who sold it kept getting "disappeared" by the Macoutes (paramilitary militia; a generic term for anti-democratic terrorists). O'Rourke had betrayed him, he said, seething, but fortunately the Macoutes didn't read *Rolling Stone*.

Making the rounds over the past six months in Port-au-Prince, I often wondered if the litany of mistrust and disappointment I heard about American media distortion was itself a distortion — many Haitians on the streets had a rather mythic notion of journalists as heroic liberators. But the awkward and at times adversarial relationship in Haiti between the foreign and domestic press became painfully obvious after President Aristide's return, its strange physics poignantly captured by *Libété*'s widely respected cartoonist, J.V. Keush. Aristide stands on the steps of the National Palace, welcoming — in English — a quartet of U.S. network cameramen, emissaries of the vast audience of taxpayers bankrolling, however reluctantly, Operation Uphold Democracy. Off to the side on the palace lawn, American soldiers hold the Haitian press at bay. "Gee," one of the hapless reporters thinks to himself in Creole, "if I were American I could speak to Tiid." The use of the president's nickname is affectionate; the sentiment is not.

On one level, the cartoon alludes to Aristide's first press conference, four days after his reinstatement by U.S. troops on October 15, 1994. Ten minutes into the clamor, Aristide shocked the packed hall by declining to entertain questions from his generally loyalist and often idolizing countrymen, justifying this insensitivity with the rationalization that the foreigners would soon bail out of Haiti altogether, and the Haitian media would have their president all to themselves. Aggrieved but compliant, the journalists retreated to the palace's interior portico, where they stoically devoured numerous trays of complimentary hors d'oeuvres, a small but rare perquisite for a press corps that is underfed, underpaid, undertrained, underappreciated, and overworked.

But there was a second, parallel conflict, similarly disturbing, explicit in the *Libété* cartoon: an indictment of the *blanc*, or foreign — read that, American — media. Beneath the caricatures, a legend deciphered the network acronyms: ABC — Ann Back Cédas (Let's Support Cédas); CBS — Cédas Bull Shit; CNN (much loathed in Haiti) — Cédas News Network; and NBC — Nou Bezwen Cédas (We Need Cédas). Ever since the *Dechoukaj*, when Father Aristide, the liberation theologian from the slums of Port-au-Prince, began to redirect the country's center of gravity, Haitians from across the political spectrum have perceived the mainstream American press, epitomized by the Sunshine Boys, as being little more than a mouthpiece for the State Department, and thus persistently anti-Aristide. "The mainstream press never understood him or even tried to understand him," Bernard Diederich once told me, explaining

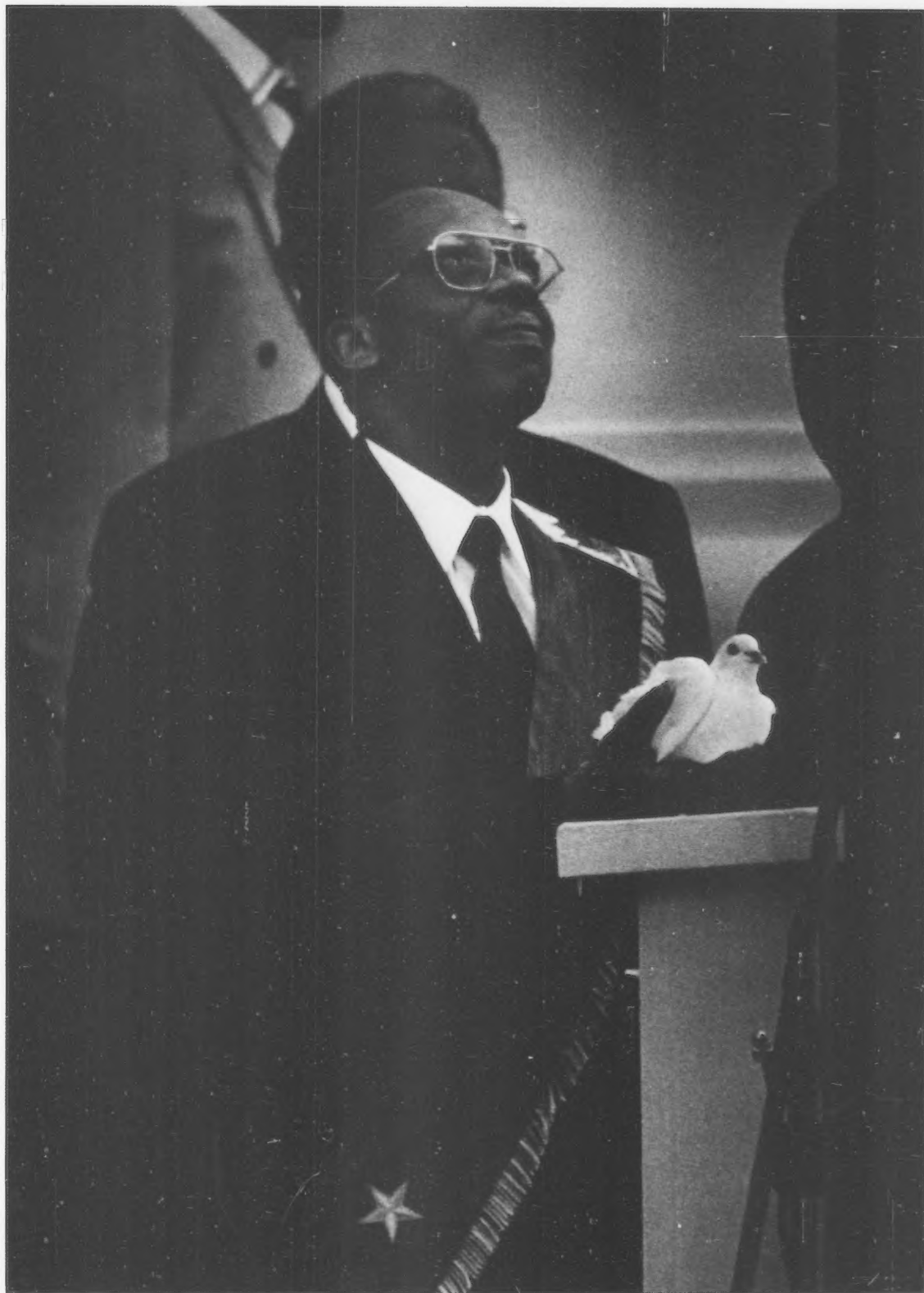
A WHISPER OF HOPE

I had been covering the situation in Haiti on and off since Duvalier left in 1986. In that time I had seen far too much death, too many wives wailing in grief, too much poverty, too much suffering, too much pain. I had seen the face of repression and the hands of injustice. But also, beyond the hardships, I had been touched by the Haitian spirit. It reaches into your soul and moves you in a way hard to describe. I wanted to believe peace would come to this troubled land, but my heart was reluctant.

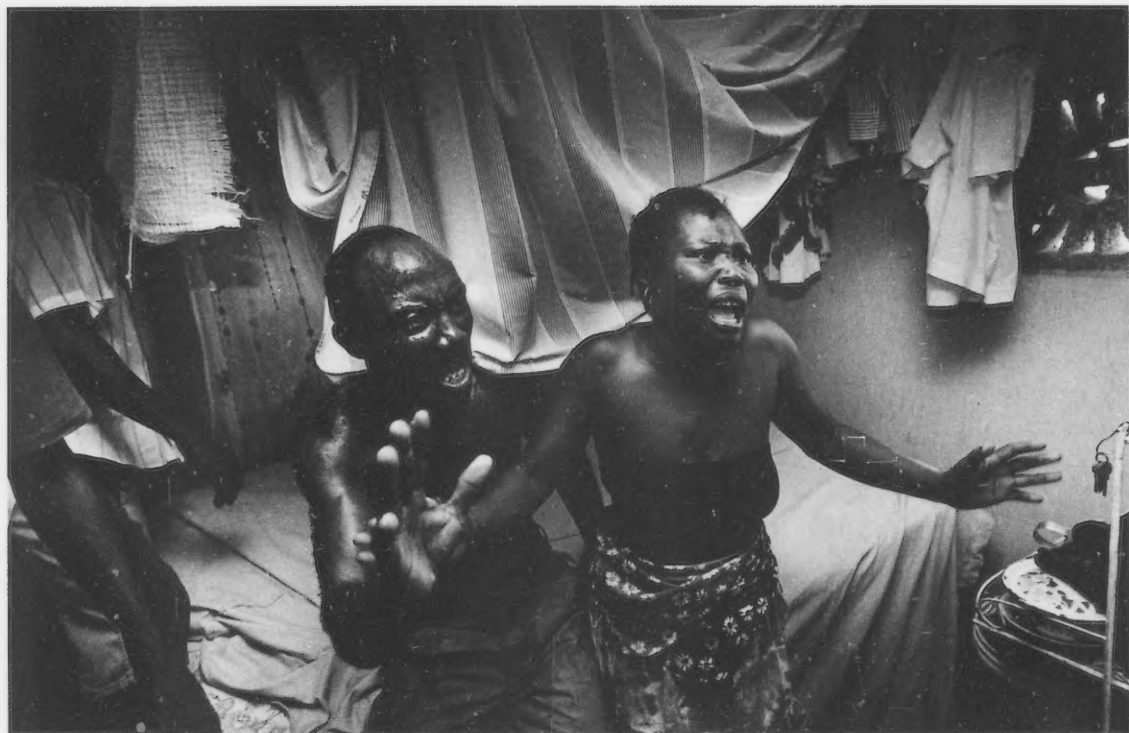
Then came a whisper of hope in a camouflage uniform, the controversial U.S. military action ordered by President Clinton. Initially they were greeted by the chaos and horror that Haiti had become, but soon the troops gained control of the streets, and there seemed a palpable lifting of fear. Haiti is a land of extremes with a long history of turmoil. Whether this tenuous calm is only a temporary respite, whether the joy now felt will leave only a bittersweet taste of peace, remains to be seen.

Carol Guzy

Guzy, a staff photographer for The Washington Post, won a 1995 Pulitzer Prize for her work in Haiti, a sampling of which is included here.



President Aristide, upon his return from three years of exile last October 15, releases a dove



A former attaché and his wife beg a revenge-seeking mob not to kill him



As a food warehouse is looted, starving Haitians steal rice from a woman who had been knocked unconscious



General Raoul Cédras views his troops, shortly before the U.S. intervention



Two U.S. soldiers protect a beating victim from a frenzied crowd

what he saw as the media's role in Aristide's unpopularity among the American public. Diederich, *Time* magazine's former Caribbean bureau chief, a drinking buddy of Graham Greene, and the dean of Haiti's foreign correspondents, has been covering Haiti since 1950. "These guys would come [to Port-au-Prince] and head straight for the embassy." As for talking to Haitians, American reporters gravitated toward English speakers, who tended to be upper class and unapologetically authoritarian. Then, in an attempt to balance the story, says Diederich, "they'd bring nuts out of the woodwork, always the same clowns, they'd use weird sources, and that's why Haiti suffered a lot."

For the foreign press, "It's always the same story — the slums versus the elites," laments Widmaier, even though Aristide would never have been elected or subsequently reinstated without the baroque coalition-building that evolved between his traditional base among the peasants and urban poor and more progressive supporters within Haiti's middle and upper classes, the million-strong diaspora, and the army's handful of socially-conscious officers.

"For reasons I don't understand," Edwidge Balutansky, the director of the U.N.-funded Haiti Info-Services, a training and resource center for journalists, told me in her modernized Victorian-era offices in Port-au-Prince, "the U.S. press responds to Washington's interests. You get the same point of view from all the papers. To me one of the best examples of this is how they treated Aristide and the military throughout the crisis [1986-94] — Aristide was a leftist radical; the military was pro-democratic." As the crisis went on, stereotypes would change as policy changed. So would buzzwords like "intransigent" and "cunning" (frequently applied to Aristide during negotiations for his peaceable return to the island). "Then, all of a sudden," she continues, "the regime were criminals."

A mainstream correspondent in Haiti works on a tightrope. Even for those with the best of intentions, the story in Haiti has never been easy to get, to understand, or elucidate. Every journalist who parachutes into Port-au-Prince for the first time is bound to be daunted by the crowds and poverty, overwhelmed by contradictory images, grasping for contemporary references. Some correspondents feel trapped; before long they sour on the beggars, the pestilence and filth, the heat; the interminable hassle of logistics — cars, rooms, phones, electricity; the devastated infrastructures, physical and administrative; the obscenity of the elite; the intrigues, circumlocutions, and cultural mysteries. Sooner or later, these correspondents begin to file stories that reflect their weariness and distaste for the assignment. A tone of petulance creeps into their prose, a subtextual implication that Haiti is ultimately insignificant.

At the Miami conference, as we waited for another session to begin, Bernard Diederich confided to me that he thought "No one would get a prize for Haitian coverage." His assessment — with a few notable exceptions — seemed amply justified.

The wonk from Planet Silicon is telling Haitian journalists, many of whom have never touched the enter key on a computer, about digital technology and its impact on the future of broadcasting. Ultra-slick visuals are projected on a sheet, draped across an upturned table. In English delivered far too rapidly for the interpreter in the glass booth at the back of the Topiary Room at the Eden Roc Hotel to translate accurately into French, the speaker describes something called individual subscriber service for satellite technology. Smart cards. Electronic coupons for radio advertising. The Intelligent Vehicle Highway System. Then comes a short video from Japan — ghost images sliding across the snowy topography of the sheet — promoting the marvels of interactive radio. A very few of the journalists look on enthralled, dreaming the impossible, but most in the audience are stunned by this presentation, their faces frozen by the absurdity of it, and one of them folds his arms on the table in front of him and cradles his head, apparently exhausted.

This tour of somebody else's future made him "cry my eyes out," Sylvain Bernier, a reporter from Radio Galaxie, told the speaker afterwards. "We have no technicians. People learned their trade twenty years ago. We have to steal a piece of cable, pay people under the table, call thirty times until you get a line."

Despite the disconnect, the conference — "The Haitian Media: Defining Our Role" — sponsored by the Inter American Press Association and the McCormick Tribune Foundation, had managed to bring together the battle-scarred veterans of the Haitian press for the first time in years, no small feat considering the almost endemic disunity among Haiti's journalists. Separately and collectively, they reflect the tensions and the factionalization within Haitian society, to the extent that they mirror the diversity of approach and opinion inherent in Haiti's democratic movement, the sprawling ideological neighborhood which they all inhabit.

The second and final morning of the conference began with a seemingly innocuous review of the evolution of the Haitian media by historian Jean Desquiron, but when it became clear that Desquiron had little to say about events beyond 1957, the year François Duvalier hijacked the island, body and soul, the session became contentious. "I'm not an analyst, I'm a storyteller, a raconteur," Desquiron protested after someone accused him of shying away from controversy. "So you tell stories on the press?" Lilyanne Pierre-Paul asked wryly, the double-entendre meant to badger the historian into a fight. "The question is impertinent," fumed Desquiron, but the audience dragged him onward into an animated debate about the political ramifications of Creole and the limits of objectivity — "The press is never neutral in Haiti," Desquiron replied.

Folks grumbled about a generation gap; those who had stayed in Haiti during the regime felt a lingering bitterness toward the returned exiles. But Clarens Renois, Radio Metropole's tall, tennis-playing news director, harbors a quixotic passion — he wants everyone in the room to form a

'It's one little candle with a lot of wind

Haitian press association, like the one they had in 1987-88, when the journalists were unified in opposition against the junta. Unfortunately, that same association degenerated into the Palace Band, a Haitian version of the Sunshine Boys. (The Sunshine Boys got the nickname because they could usually be found poolside at the Holiday Inn; the Band because it took requests.) It seemed paradoxical to Renois that democracy could sow divisiveness among the profession, but few in attendance were especially keen on his idea.

In the hour before lunch, the Haitian-American chairman of Wesleyan University's sociology department, Alex Dupuy, offered the assembly a geopolitical overview, tracking the events and philosophies that had culminated in the pounding of Haiti's square peg into the round hole of the New World Order.

As debate rambled on, its focus gravitated to one of the core dilemmas confronting Haiti's media: Were they to be watchdogs or advocates of Aristide's government? How best to balance vigilance with self-censorship? Many of the journalists fretted that objectivity absent self-restraint would play into the hands of anti-democratic forces. "It's one little candle with a light with a lot of wind trying to blow it out, this democracy," said Pierre-Paul. "Even though you are not satisfied with the way the government's functioning," she had told me earlier in Port-au-Prince, "you cannot attack a democratic government the same way you attack a dictatorship."

But how do you report on a political culture that has no habit of accountability? "It's not easy to investigate the public administration," said Renois. "It's not in their routine." Back in Port-au-Prince I had listened to Max Chauvet, publisher of the conservative *Le Nouvelliste*, Haiti's oldest newspaper, critique the government's own lack of solidarity: "You have a faction for privatization and a faction against privatization. So you really don't know what the government thinks about privatization. It's like a doubletalk government. Everybody says we'll have a more open press now that Aristide's back but it's not true — everything's still secret." I had also spoken with several younger, more disillusioned journalists, one of whom felt so frustrated by the government's impenetrability and mistreated by security personnel that he planned to "boycott President Aristide's activities, and not report on them." Aristide's press liaisons, he told me — and every foreign correspondent working in Haiti would agree — "don't know their jobs." Or do, but live in fear of being shown the door. As we know from Eastern Europe, new democracies, often blinded by arrogance and self-righteousness, don't relate very well to the press. It's a conceptual prejudice — the new folks think they're the good guys.

Nowhere has the ethic of impartiality been more hotly contested than in the state-owned media, an issue that surfaced in January when the government's clumsy attempt to define itself and micromanage the spin on its increasingly inert image wreaked havoc at the national television station,

TNH. Frantz Marcelin, the station's general director since October 15, learned of his dismissal while listening to one of the local radio stations. His newsroom staff, whom Marcelin had recruited with assurances they would not be molded into a propaganda tool, walked out in protest and were subsequently replaced by the new director, Dominique Constant, a former Ministry of Information official and radio journalist, a friend of President Aristide.

Constant was sanguine about the dispute when I spoke with him at TNH several weeks later. The problems foremost on his mind were pragmatic: building an advertising base to supplement an anemic budget, purchasing fuel for the station's generator, upgrading TNH's technological resources and improving production quality, decreasing the reliance (currently 50 percent) on imported programming. "People would rather see Haitian programming than something ridiculous from the United States," said Constant, perhaps naively.

TNH, as he envisioned it, would become "a big school for the country. For example, we can teach someone how to lodge a complaint against someone. We can teach people about hygiene." Listening to Constant, I asked myself, Who other than the well-washed elite has electricity? In a country with an annual per capita income of \$255, who has a television set? "I feel comfortable criticizing problems," he insisted. "Our duty is to present both sides and avoid explosions. I don't wait for the government to tell me what to do." The government, said Constant, could "create their own propaganda" by simply getting the job done — fixing the infrastructure, reducing the cost of living.

In what looks to be a very long interim, most Haitians expect the state-controlled radio and TV stations to become, in the words of Lilyanne Pierre-Paul, "constipated by the propaganda food."

The Miami conference seemed to end in disarray — Lilyanne Pierre-Paul and Clarens Renois sparring over the need for a press association; Edwidge Balutansky and Marie Jean from Radio Tropic FM unwilling to role-play in a silly exercise conducted by a chirpy management specialist from the University of Miami; George Krinsky, president of the Center for Foreign Journalists, mightily offended by the anti-capitalist rhetoric of Alex Dupuy; the sponsors grouching about the entire aimless affair.

The sponsors in Miami didn't understand, Bernard Diederich said several days after the conference had ended. "There was a lot of hope in that meeting. The big important part of the whole conference was the realization that these people had matured a hell of a lot."

Now they are all back home, back at work, as Haiti resurrects itself from the dead. I keep thinking of something Marie Jean said: "The Haitian press just gets better when there's trouble." Frankly, however, they could use a breather, though it's probably not in the cards. Presidential elections are scheduled for December. Who's running? No one really knows. Opportunities for improvement abound. ♦

trying to blow it out, this democracy'

Showdown at g e n e r a g a p

Here come the
young guns of the
alternative press

by Jeff Gremillion

The alternative press — whose roots lie in underground rags protesting the Vietnam War, celebrating rock-n-roll and the counterculture, and generally nipping at the heels of wealthy mainstream dailies in the late '60s and early '70s — is having a mid-life crisis. And its pooh-bahs are struggling with the simplest questions. What is the alternative press? What's its purpose? "It's a crisis of mission and conscience in the established alternative weeklies," says Christine Triano of the Institute for Alternative Journalism.

At the same time, young entrepreneurs and journalists are developing successful Generation X-oriented weekly tabloids in major cities right under the noses of established alternatives. The new papers are alterna-

tives to alternatives and have little in common with their forebears. They eschew hard news and traditional reporting in favor of satire and socio-cultural commentary; the original alternatives still revel in their roles as gadflies and watchdogs. The new papers only dabble in politics — mostly so-called "identity politics," or what one might call Who-am-I? politics — while the grown-ups of the alternative press wear their left-leaning idealism on their sleeves, even as they gear their coverage more and more toward comfortable suburbanites. The new weeklies don't much reflect the values and revolutionary zeal of the original alternatives, but they are insiders who can look eye-to-eye at their twentysomething audience. And they have inherited the shoestring budgets and the hunger the first alternatives once had.

The dynamic of the competition, then, is old vs. young, and comfortable vs. struggling. So it's the finan-

Jeff Gremillion is assistant editor at CJR; he is twenty-four.



tion

cial success of the alternative press lifers, at least in part, that has brought them to this crossroads. And, in many cases, the rich are getting richer. *The Village Voice* bought the *L.A. Weekly* for a rumored \$10 million in January. And alternative chains like New Times, Inc. continue to swallow independents throughout the country (see sidebar, page 39). Corporatization, mergers, newspaper wars, and plain old gray hair have made a lot of alternative newspapers seem in many ways like the mainstream media — The Establishment.

"We've become our parents," says Kate Hawthorne, editor of the newsletter for the Association of Alternative Newsweeklies, a group of 104 established alternatives boasting a combined circulation of more than 5.5 million. Most of the founding members of the association, she says, have come a long way from eating brown rice and sleeping in the car to save enough money to pay the printer, never in their wildest dreams envisioning the kind of lasting success that is their current reality. "Nobody thought it would happen like this."

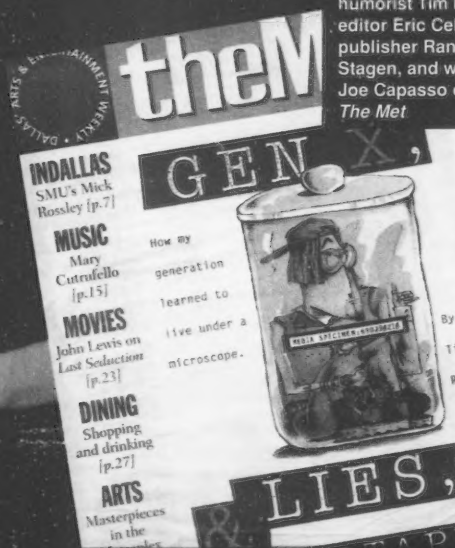
While success doesn't necessarily compromise a publication or dull its edge, many established alternatives have for decades thrashed the same agenda — "pro-choice, pro-gay rights, and pro-Grateful Dead," as one old-school alternative journalist half-joked.

"A lot of these weeklies don't realize they're being laughed at," says Tim Keck, publisher of *The Stranger*, Seattle's upstart alternative with an unmistakable Generation X sensibility. "They're

out of touch."

"Out of touch" is perhaps the most damning buzz phrase of the nineties, and it summons another important concern that has arisen for the older alternatives: How do they reach out to Xers? The concern takes on special urgency in the face of competition from weeklies created and staffed by young people.

Partying in Dallas: humorist Tim Rogers, editor Eric Celeste, publisher Randy Stagen, and writer Joe Capasso of *The Met*



Steamed in Seattle: publisher Tim Keck and editor S.P. Miskowski of *The Stranger*



Appealing to the young and restless twentysomething audience is not only important philosophically; there's also money in it. Generation X is a demographic advertisers crave. College students and young professionals usually don't have kids or house payments, and their income, even if it's paltry, is highly disposable; they buy lots of CDs and books, go to lots of movies and clubs, and eat out often. Along with cash from classified ads and lucrative new 900-number personals, display ad sales are the lifeblood of the alternative press because most of the weekly tabloids that make up its ranks — both new and established — are free to readers and derive no revenue from subscriptions or newsstand purchases. But going after twentysomethings isn't as easy as simply deciding to do so; we're a tricky lot.

"Younger readers," says Keck, "are more wily about how they can be manipulated by the press" and leery of publications that seem to take themselves and their pet issues too seriously. Jay Walljasper, editor of *Utne Reader*, a

digest of alternative journalism, puts it differently: "Young people today, perhaps more than any other generation, have finely tuned b.s. detectors.

"You don't say, 'Hey look, you twentysomethings, here's an article on Kurt Cobain.' You'd look like a forty-five-year-old with a nose ring."

Trying to appeal to Generation X without coming off as condescending and cynical — and without alienating older readers — is a balancing act for established alternatives. Some of them are teetering, and that's good news for the

leaders of the alternative press's fun-loving, journalistically hollow new wave.

S.P. Miskowski was steamed when she read last year's Fall Fashion issue in the *Seattle Weekly*, the Grunge Rock capital's nineteen-year-old alternative paper. She objected to its use of "lithe, sweet" models as "bait" for older readers, since young people couldn't possibly afford the haute couture presented. So she let the *Weekly* have it in an editorial in the appropriately grungy new alternative, *The Stranger*, which she edits.

"Several recent *Weekly* covers have touted a mythical version of the youth scene in Seattle," wrote Miskowski. "Bright colors and lead stories on what's new, young, and hot splash the newsstand on a regular basis. Yet the paper's editorial perspective hasn't changed, and the articles are clearly written from the outside, looking in. The gaze remains the same — middle class, middle aged . . ."

"The whole spectrum of social and political activity among people under thirty-five in Seattle," she railed (never mind that she herself is thirty-seven),

"is regularly ignored by local media."

In a city like Seattle, internationally celebrated for its youth culture, a perceived void of the nature Miskowski describes is an open call for competition. Publisher Keck, twenty-eight, accepted the invitation three and a half years ago when he and some friends from the University of Wisconsin left behind a humor-oriented college rag they had started, called *The Onion*, to launch *The Stranger*. The free weekly has grown from twelve to forty-eight pages in average length and has a circulation of more than 40,000. It has a secure base of GenX-hungry advertisers including many alternative-music clubs and offbeat small businesses, like tattoo parlors and body piercers. Keck says many of the advertisers, who pay roughly half of what they would pay for comparable space in *Seattle Weekly*, weren't advertising at all, or they were advertising only sporadically in the *Weekly*, before *The Stranger* came on the scene and gave them a straight, cheap line to young urbanites.

The Stranger's editorial focus is more on social and cultural commentary and music and arts coverage than on traditional journalism. Miskowski doesn't even consider herself a journalist, per se. The funky alternative's goal isn't "about staying on top of the news day by day," she says. "It's about continuing to question things and continuing to laugh."

A former *Stranger* editor put it more indelicately when she told a reporter: "We don't have, like, a political agenda; we don't have baby causes. We're just doing it, and it's for profit, and that's the whole point of the thing. And doing hard news — I mean, people have short attention spans. They want something that's going to grab them, something they can laugh at, something that's silly."

There is a short news section called "In the Field" in the front of the tabloid that includes short features with no particular sense of timeliness — a profile of an aging activist-priest, a tale of two homeless youths who were arrested for squatting in an abandoned hotel. There is also a "Call to

Action." Readers were recently implored, for example, to speak out against state legislation that would allow parents to commit their underaged kids to mental hospitals against their will.

An op-ed section includes an editorial or two on an odd assortment of national and international topics. Some of them, like a recent piece on the National Endowment for the Arts, are clever and informative. The NEA piece, conspicuously titled "Fuck the NEA," argued that the hoopla over saving the endowment from the GOP knife is foolish given the wealth of other art funding sources that don't carry with them the moral conscience of *The American Taxpayer*. An editorial on the history and current plight of Mexico's Zapatista peasants was dense and hard to get through without a scorecard.

There is usually one lengthy piece — sometimes a feature, sometimes fiction — that spans two or three pages. The rest of *The Stranger* is given over to cartoons, reviews, listings, personals, and a handful of in-your-face columns like "Savage Love" — a graphic sex advice column by Dan Savage, a gay drag queen who likes correspondence to him to begin with the salutation, "Hey, faggot." Sexuality, sexual politics, and related issues like AIDS are dealt with frequently and bluntly by *The Stranger*, whose readership, with a median age of twenty-nine, is 30 percent gay or lesbian, according to a recent demographic survey commissioned by the paper.

As a whole, *The Stranger* doesn't derive its appeal to young readers from covering their activities in a traditional journalistic sense; any decent reporter of any age can do that. *The Stranger* wins over twentysomethings because it sparks and engages in dialogue — without distance from or awe of its readers — on an eclectic batch of issues and ideas that somehow resonates with its audience.

Then there's *Seattle Weekly*, described by a formidable eastern alternative editor as the most staid of the alternatives. The average age of its readers is late thirties, says *Weekly*

senior editor Eric Scigliano. The *Weekly's* news coverage and comment are clearly superior — deft analytical reporting and writing on city and state politics and issues like health care and the Great Northwest perennial, the environment. The user-friendly tabloid follows the same successful formula employed by most of the country's alternative weeklies: editorials, news briefs, and a few longer news pieces up front followed by the longish cover story; then the extensive A&E section with reviews and listings galore; then personals. It's different from most other alternatives in one key way, however; it comes at a price — 75 cents.

"There's probably some resentment of our price tag," says Scigliano, commenting on what he calls the "generational friction" between his paper and *The Stranger*. "The *Weekly* is not a generationally targeted paper," he says. "It never was. The *Weekly* has always written better than any other paper about city affairs, school-board issues, the whole economy, not just the music economy." He says his paper covers a wide range of ethnic groups and issues of local importance, while *The Stranger* caters exclusively to a "subculture" of urban Xers.

Miskowski, who's reluctant to categorize her readers as twentysomethings, says she and her staff — average age twenty-nine — are just trying to produce a publication that originates inside the important youth culture of Seattle, an otherwise "dowdy community that takes its well-meaning institutions very seriously."

"We're reporting on the inside instead of just commenting on youth," she says. "It's not, 'Isn't that cute what

the kids are doing this week?' There's something really creepy about that."

"I'm so glad Dallas has two free weeklies now," began the letter to the editor of *The Met*, the new alternative trying to give the fifteen-year-old *Dallas Observer*, a New Times paper since 1991, a run for its money. "If I'm feeling . . . self-righteous . . . humorless, and desperate for the recognition I so clearly deserve, I pick up one of the weeklies. If I'm feeling . . . goofy . . . young-spirited, and — generally — that the world will go on whether I am here or not, I pick up the other."

Judging from its inclusion in a *Met* public relations packet, the upstart's editor, Eric Celeste, twenty-seven, appreciates the characterization. Celeste, a former associate editor of *D*, Dallas's city magazine, and publisher Randy Stagen, twenty-four, joined forces and launched *The*

Met last spring after an agonizing sixteen months raising \$250,000 in start-up capital. Stagen, who like Seattle's Keck parlayed his experience of creating a successful college paper into a real-world venture, says the time was right to give the *Observer* some light-hearted competition.

"My friends and I were getting tired of the constant bombardment of death, crime, and scandal by the *Observer*," Stagen says. "I just wanted to give the city a paper that wasn't so heavy."

The Met, with its slick, professional design with plenty of easy-on-the-eyes white space and large, generously spaced type, looks more like the *Observer* than it does *The Stranger*. But it shares *The Stranger's* aversion to hard news and lengthy stories. Billed as

Sex columnist Dan Savage likes his letters to begin, 'Hey, faggot'

an "arts and entertainment weekly," *The Met* doesn't drift too far from its focus, devoting most of its book to solid A&E coverage, reviews, and listings.

The writing, frequently in the first person, is decidedly apolitical, but it's consistently lively and smart and often quite funny — as when *The Met*'s twenty-five-year-old humorist, Tim Rogers, took on the overhyped angst of Generation X in a cover piece. *The Met*, in its hip vacuousness, is a good read.

"My reader," explains Stagen, "doesn't care that city hall is stealing from us. He cares that there's a great band playing tonight and that there's cold beer at Phil's Bar."

On the business front, *The Met*'s ad strategy was designed to compete with the *Observer*, says Stagen. Identical ad sizes make *Observer* ads an easy fit in *The Met*, and a bargain at 35 to 45 percent cheaper than the *Observer*.

The Met staff has aggressively marketed its paper — "guerrilla marketing," as Stagen puts it — with radio promotions, a dial-a-hit phone service audibly showcasing the local bands the paper covers, and a foray onto the Internet, a first among Texas weeklies. But despite Stagen and Celeste's claims of unexpected, runaway success — with a circulation of 50,000, and growing as they have from an average of thirty-two pages to forty-eight in about a year — *Observer* editor Peter Elkind says matter-of-factly that he does not feel threatened, a sentiment echoed by the *Observer*'s ad director.

"I don't think we compete with *The Met*," Elkind says. To be sure, his paper's circulation doubles that of *The Met*. And Elkind says the *Observer*'s A&E reporters and critics, including three twenty-six-year-olds, are the best in town. "We're more in touch than we've ever been," he says, obviously unfazed at being on the wrong side of the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*'s 1995 "What's In, What's Out" list, opposite *The Met*.

Elkind is proud of the hard-news bent at the *Observer* — by all counts a solid journalistic enterprise, reflecting New Times's reputation for having the highest standards stacks of money can buy. And he says he doesn't need to lighten up to appeal to Xers. "I think younger

readers care about what's going on in government and business just like people over thirty," he says. "I don't think there's a virtue in being frivolous."

"We want to cut through all the pompousness," says *The Met*'s Celeste. "If we can be too juvenile, they can be too preachy. I think it's better to be too juvenile." He does worry about not being taken seriously as a journalist, but not about *The Met*'s allergy to issues. "We reflect the new counterculture, which is nonideological. Let's be smart about what we take seriously and not wake up in twenty years and be disillusioned."

Perhaps the alternative-weekly scene in Chicago offers a hopeful glimpse into the future for *The Stranger* and *The Met*. It's been nearly a decade since the ahead-of-its-time Hieggelke family began to carve its flashy, youth-oriented niche in the Windy City, in the shadow of the greatly respected, twenty-three-year-old *Reader*. In 1986, Brian, then twenty-three, his wife Jan, then twenty-four, and his kid brother Brent, then nineteen, created *NewCity*.

The *Reader* rivaled *Seattle Weekly* as a tempting target for a bright, hip compe-
petitor, intimidating as it is with its dizzyingly long, literary cover stories — around 9,000 words on average — and its colorless bulk. The paper is usually around 180 pages long and comes in four sections, each of which is as fat as *NewCity* in its entirety, around 48 pages.

Brian Hieggelke, *NewCity* editor and co-publisher, says that he and his relatives wanted to "create something lively" as an alternative to the *Reader*. Hesitant to categorize his readers as GenX and risk alienating potential older readers, as all the new alternative

editors have been, the elder Hieggelke says, tellingly, that when Richard Nixon died last year his paper barely mentioned it. "But when Kurt Cobain died, that was our cover story."

What's hopeful about Chicago, in addition to the continuing success of *NewCity*, with its circulation now at a smooth 64,000, is the healthy competition between the two weeklies — and the *Reader*'s acceptance of the Xers-vs.-Boomers dynamic so obviously at play.

Reader senior editor Michael Miner says his staff tries to keep its many pages fresh by running frequent free-lance pieces by twentysomethings. And the paper is currently undergoing a makeover to make it more visually exciting. But the *Reader* (circulation 137,000) faces facts: "We identified a readership back in '71 that has grown older with us," explains Miner, who says he likes "fresh and short" *NewCity*.

Hieggelke says he has "expanded the market, rather

than divided it" with his paper. Chicago, he says, is big enough for two alternative weeklies. Dallas and Seattle probably are, as well.

"We don't want to set ourselves up as a primary source of information," says *The Stranger*'s Miskowski. "We encourage people to read widely and critically."

For his part, Dallas's Celeste says his young readers are smart citizens who read a variety of publications and who are not necessarily disengaged slackers. He says he doesn't even mind if they read the *Observer*. For now. But Celeste's long-term plans for *The Met* include gradually adding more hard news to his paper's party-hearty menu. He plans this gradual addition, he says, to coincide with the gradual aging of his readers, leaving the frivolity of youth to the young.

'If we can
be juvenile,
they can be
preachy.
It's better to
be juvenile'

High Noon in 'Frisco

by Larry Smith

Mike Lacey and Bruce Brugmann both got into the newspaper business essentially to "punch a few people in the fucking head," as Lacey, who founded the Phoenix *New Times* in 1970, once said. Brugmann phrases it slightly differently, explaining that he began the *San Francisco Bay Guardian* in 1966 "to provide an alternative to the big monopoly dailies — to print the news and raise hell."

Lacey and Brugmann are legends of alternative journalism. Brugmann, fifty-nine, is a stubborn bear of a man from the old I.F. Stone school of journalism. He still bats away at his blue Royal manual typewriter, enjoys a two-martini lunch, and works relentlessly to shake up institutions and individuals he thinks need shaking. He is clear about the issues he cares about; the corporatization of San Francisco, the state of daily journalism, and the local power company's business practices are just a few of the things he loves to hate. He recently won a local media watchdog organization's Golden Gadfly Award for lifetime achievement, and "gadfly" couldn't be a more appropriate description for Brugmann. He loves local politics and loathes newspaper chains, two facts he doesn't hide, especially when discussing New Times.

No less hard-boiled, New Times's Lacey and business partner Jim Larkin have stamped into the '90s, expanding New Times, Inc., their growing multimillion-dollar chain of alternatives, with take-no-prisoners zeal. With more money to pay writers and less of an agenda, their six New Times outlets are attractive options for writers frustrated by the financial and often ideological limits imposed by many alternative weeklies. Lacey and Larkin also maintain a more corporate style and a less political approach to journalism. New Times papers rarely run endorsements or editorials — a philosophy that has earned the company the nickname "the Gannett corporation of the alternative press." With New Times's recent acquisition of the previously independently owned *SF Weekly*, two of the most influential players in weekly journalism have collided in San Francisco.

Since rumors of a *Weekly* sale to New Times began flying last fall, the *Guardian* repeatedly called New Times's approach "cookie-cutter" journalism, reporting that "the way in which the New Times does business symbolizes much that has been lost as the alternative press has matured." The feud was dramatized in a flurry of letters in the newsletter of the Association of Alternative Newsweeklies. Brugmann wrote that the fast-expanding New Times has plans for alternative weekly world domination, suggesting that the association sponsor a seminar titled "How to Keep from Selling your Paper to a Chain." In a particularly acerbic reply, Lacey denied the charge and wrote of Brugmann: "You wrap yourself in the Constitution, the First Amendment, and a level of self-righteousness that would suck the air out of a room full of Old Testament patriarchs. If you don't stop it, you're going to suffer a spell."

The high-stakes competition between the two weeklies is a fascinating case study of today's alternative journalism. If a locally owned weekly as solid as the *Guardian* cannot withstand the New Times challenge, then the continued chaining of the alternative press may mean that the future of a largely unorganized movement that grew out of independence and activism in the '60s and '70s may be, ironically enough, found in large corporations.

New Times, with papers in Dallas, Denver, Houston, Miami, Phoenix, and now San Francisco, isn't the only chain in the business. Other groups such as the Metro Newspapers, Eason Publications, Advocate Newspapers, Alternative Media, and Boston's Phoenix Media Group also own multiple papers. But none has been as aggressive in expanding its empire. The secret of the New Times's success? A consistent format, national advertising, and a clear concept of what makes a New Times paper and what doesn't. The New Times corporation may be more involved in the profit-making than head-punching business, but the company's papers do still offer top-quality investigative journalism and good arts and culture coverage. Yet New Times has never published in a city with any established competition. With the *Guardian*, New Times's *SF Weekly* clearly has its hands full.

To meet the New Times challenge, the *Guardian* doesn't have to change so much as continue its evolution, begun years ago in response to both an influx of younger readers and an expanding *SF Weekly*. Over the years, as the *Weekly* began making a name for itself as the king of social-cultural coverage in a social-cultural kind of town, the *Guardian* wisely began expanding its arts and entertainment coverage as well. The *Guardian* now reads like two papers — the you-can-fight-city-hall product of the '60s plus the media-savvy, hipster guide for the '90s that's currently launching a major online service.

So far, though, what should have been — and might still be — a good old-fashioned journalistic showdown in a town that sure could use one, has been little more than a battle of the food pages. The most notable difference between the old and new *Weekly* is probably the expanded restaurant coverage. With the *Guardian's* own beefing up of food inches in the last few months, the strategy seems to be to try to win the hearts of readers and wallets of advertisers through their stomachs.

And so as New Times digs into its new turf and the *Guardian* battens down its hatches, it's anybody's guess whether readers will see a fiery journalistic competition fought with great stories and breakneck reportage, or if the battle will be nothing more than an expensive food fight. ♦

Larry Smith is an editor at AlterNet, a San Francisco-based wire service for the alternative press.

Revolution in CYBERIA

As the FCC, the Congress,
and megamedia redraw the map,
who will tell the people?

by Neil Hickey

"There's a Pulitzer Prize book in this, I'm telling you. And I'm not kidding." Reed Hundt, the slim, boyish — and at this moment shirt-sleeved — forty-seven-year-old chairman of the Federal Communications Commission leans forward in his easy chair in his M Street Washington office. "This is the end of television as we know it — and the *reinvention* of television," he declares earnestly. "And not only is this *not* being reported — right now it's not even the subject of imaginative thinking" in the general press. He's talking about the startling new digital broadcast TV systems that will soon create six or seven over-the-air television "channels" for every one now in existence. Huge uncertainties abound: How will this vast new electronic real estate be utilized? By whom? Under what conditions? With how much government input? How will the public's best interests be served — if at all?

And beyond digital TV, for all its revolutionary importance, lurk — Hundt fervently insists — a cornucopia of other communications issues that remain dark mysteries to the public. "I've always thought news meant telling people new things. And this is about something new. We are all strug-

gling, everyone involved in this area, struggling to find words to describe the new things, metaphors that work to communicate rather than close the imagination. It's not easy, but there are Pulitzers to win for those people who first figure out how to communicate about communications."

For TV watchers, the earth is shifting tectonically under their feet (or under their couches) and hardly one in a million knows it, according to frustrated regulators at the FCC who are charged with refereeing a titanic, three-way tug-of-war between powerful factions in the broadcast, cable, and telephone businesses. They find themselves at the storm center, as never before in the commission's history, of winds that will ventilate virtually every living room and boardroom in America. The emerging infostructure is "the greatest story in the history of communications since the invention of the printing press," Hundt has declared. (By the end of 1996, telecommunications will account for one-sixth of the U.S. economy, according to the Council of Economic Advisors.)

On the one hand you have Hundt and his mentors, President Clinton and Vice President Gore, who harbor a utopian vision of new jobs, lower prices, and better education once the new paradigm is operative. For their part, broadcasters, cablers, and telephone folk are clashing furiously with buckler and broadsword under the tattered banner "All We Want Is A Fair Advantage Over

Neil Hickey has covered telecommunications issues for three decades.

Our Competitors" — while at the same time forging strategic alliances (sometimes with one another). Billions are being spent, and tens of billions budgeted, for a so-called "global information infrastructure" of which no one — least of all the public — can discern the ultimate shape. The term Information Superhighway (coined by Alvin Toffler and promoted by Gore) has long outlived its pertinency: a stingy, old-think metaphor that doesn't nearly express the oceanic sweep and interconnectedness of the New Cyberia — computers, satellites, wired and wireless telephony, interactive cable, digitally compressed broadcast signals, data transmission, and "video dial tones" that can produce "video on demand" to suit the most voracious information and/or entertainment consumer twenty-four hours a day.

At the precise intersection of all those vectors stands the lanky figure of Reed Hundt — unknown inside the Beltway until his appointment as boss of the FCC. (He did go to prep school with Gore and law school with both Bill and Hillary Clinton.) When he took over the commission, he was "an unsung Latham & Watkins litigator," as *The American Lawyer* described him, but now "has the power to change the world. Is he a new age visionary? Or is he just smarter — and more arrogant — than the average bureaucrat?" Without question, the magazine concluded, he is "now the most powerful lawyer in Washington."

Created by the Communications Act of 1934, the FCC now oversees 21,000 broadcast stations, cable television, the telephone industry, land mobile services, private and citizens band radio, and microwave, cellular, satellite, and fiber optic communications. It grew from 233 employees and a budget of \$1 million to a staff of 2,000 and a proposed 1996 budget of \$222.6 million. It's currently encamped, however, at the most precarious crossroads in all its history, pinned down by cannon fire from the Republican-controlled Congress, some of whose members are committed to wounding it, perhaps fatally. Indeed, Hundt has recently found himself on the short end of votes at the five-member commission, unable to depend on the support even of his two fellow Democrats, the FCC veteran James Quello and Susan Ness, who have often sided with Republicans Andrew Barrett and Rachele Chong.

As soon as he was appointed in 1993, Reed Hundt charged from the chute like a Barcelona bull — or perhaps a new age New Dealer, itching for hands-on contact with telecommunications issues. Hundt projected himself as the polar opposite of Ronald Reagan's first FCC chairman, Mark Fowler, who once decreed that television was nothing more than a "toaster with pictures," and

deserved about the same level of government regulation. Hundt's first major initiative was to roll back cable subscription rates an average of 7 percent (after an earlier 10 percent cut by the Bush FCC), a move that infuriated the cable industry and also threw a monkey wrench (the participants bellowed) into a proposed \$26 billion merger between cable giant Tele-Communications Inc. (TCI) and the Bell Atlantic regional phone company — a merger that had been perceived as the first giant step toward constructing the Infobahn. Then Hundt mused publicly about the perils of TV violence, and embarked on stricter enforcement of the Children's Television Act, which mandates that stations provide some regular educational and informational shows for kids. Those smoke signals set broadcasters to grumbling. Cable executives accused him of favoring the Baby Bells over cable. TCI's John Malone declared that the only way to launch the information age was to "shoot Hundt. Don't let him do any more damage." (He later apologized.) Time Warner c.e.o. Gerald Levin criticized the FCC's "Soviet-style regulation." There were also those who felt the FCC had done too little. Eli Noam, director of the Institute for Tele-Information at Columbia University, complained, "They will tell you lots of things, but it's a lot of p.r. It's communications by after-dinner speech."

Everything was turned upside down with the arrival of Newt Gingrich and the Republican sweep of the House and Senate in 1994. Hands-on was out and hands-off was in — at least in Congress. The unthinkable began to be thought — and discussed. Senator Larry Pressler, the new chairman of the Senate Commerce Committee, which has oversight responsibility for the FCC, said the commission is "heading in exactly the wrong direction" and that the Clinton administration's activist bent has "ballooned both FCC staff and budget." Congressman Jack Fields, chairman of the House Subcommittee on Telecommunications and Finance, trumpeted his intention to "dramatically reform" the FCC. The right-wing Heritage Foundation on March 22 issued "A Policy Maker's Guide to Deregulating Telecommunications. . . . Is the FCC Worth Its Cost?" advising that ". . . Congress should not miss the rare opportunity presented by this year's deregulatory legislation to eliminate the FCC once and for all." On May 30, the conservative Progress and Freedom Foundation — which is closely linked to Gingrich — called for eliminating the FCC and replacing it with an "Office of Communications Policy," which would have drastically less authority. Media theorist George Gilder earlier warned that if the U.S. telecommunications industry isn't totally deregulated, the country risks



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losing up to \$2 trillion of new business in the 1990s. And Speaker Gingrich, in a conversation with editors of the authoritative trade journal *Broadcasting & Cable*, offered these words, which rattled the timbers at 1919 M Street:

I was at a dinner one night and I asked fifteen c.e.o.s of telecommunications companies if we would be better off if [the FCC] were abolished, and all fifteen raised their hands. Every one of them said the FCC is slowing down the development of the twenty-first century, that it costs us billions of dollars and thousands of jobs in the cellular industry and that we would be better off and would dominate the world market better and create more jobs for Americans if we did not have the current FCC structure. I was stunned at the intensity and the unanimity that the FCC is a major block to our getting into the twenty-first century.

Those executives obviously made a big impression on the speaker because by late May, he was declaring he'd like to "phase out the FCC in three to five years at the most." There's a massive automobile industry in the U.S., he pointed out, "but no Department of Automobiles."

Against that turbulent backdrop, the most far-reaching telecommunications-reform legislation in history is currently wending its tortuous way through Congress and may be on the president's desk before summer's end. When and if it becomes law, the FCC will be the enforcer. The House and Senate versions, as proposed, contain some ticking time bombs for journalists and have also triggered major concerns among consumer advocates fearful that the tattered remnants of the public trustee-ship standard — requiring broadcasters to serve the "public interest, convenience, and necessity" as a condition of doing business — will be jettisoned and never seen again. At the heart of the new legislation is the not-so-revolutionary, but never fully tested, notion that competition beats the heck out of regulation as a means of assuring the greatest economic good for the greatest number.

The law may decree that:

- regulations be repealed banning the ownership by one company of a newspaper and a TV station in the same market
- cable operators be allowed into the telephone business and telephone companies permitted to transmit video signals
- broadcast companies be freed up to own cable systems, and vice-versa
- telephone companies be allowed to buy cable systems in their region
- limitations be lifted on how many radio stations and eased on how many TV stations one company can own

- rates be deregulated for service beyond basic cable

- broadcast stations' license terms be increased to ten years (from TV's five and radio's seven)

- broadcasters be allowed to own more than one television station in a market.

Some of those proposals, say consumer advocates, imperil the practice of sound journalism. "I think there's a great deal of danger in this legislation," says Bradley Stillman, Telecommunications Policy Director of the Consumer Federation of America. "If one entity owns the local newspaper, the television station, the cable system, and the telephone company, any reporter for that newspaper or TV station who does a story not pleasing to the company could be in serious difficulty. I think that threat is very real." Consolidation and concentration of media companies, in other words, can choke robust journalism. Corporate barons are notoriously uninterested in investigative reporting, either about themselves or about peers with whom they share boardrooms.

The new law might "radically affect the news environment as we know it," says Jeffrey Chester, executive director of the Center for Media Education in Washington. "The issue of media structure is an unseen cancer on the democratic body politic and it's going to get worse." Historically, the merger of media companies has meant cutbacks in investigative reporting, he says, as those companies try to find economies of scale. Instead of the hoped-for competition "you'll see more mergers and more single owners of various media in a single market, which does not bode well for diversity. The stakes are much higher now, and journalists themselves are not looking at it. They're keeping their eyes closed and their fingers crossed hoping that this brave new world will somehow work out OK. It won't."

Suppose, for example, that

- a reporter for one of the newly emerging all-news local cable channels uncovered shady dealings by its parent cable operator;

- or that a newsperson at a local paper — owned by a TV station in town — learned exclusively that the station's manager was paying kickbacks to advertising agencies;

- or that a TV station's news department found out that the local cable system — with whom it shared a corporate parent — was juggling its rates to hide price increases to its subscribers;

- or that a network news division learned that its sibling cable systems were installing shoddy and perhaps dangerous materials in subscribers' homes.

Those hypotheticals, along with a score of others easily imaginable, might put journalists on the rack in their desire to do an honest job without undermining the companies they work for.

Neil Hickey: *As a result of the rewriting of rules pertaining to the media industries that's now in progress in Congress, many news organizations — print and electronic — may end up absorbed into huge companies with no history of, or respect for, the traditions of journalism.*

Reed Hundt: Americans have good reason to be concerned about such prospects. But the FCC isn't doing anything to stop that. Maybe it should. But it doesn't. What *could* we do? The answer is that digital broadcasting will give us a chance to reshape broadcast competition rules on the basis of sound anti-trust principles and to guarantee that there is competition in the marketplace. Now if we're talking about news in terms of, let's say the NBC Nightly News, then we're in the old model, the analog world, and that's not operative in the digital world. That's not to say there won't be an NBC Nightly News. But there could be dozens of sources of news, a welter of conduits both local and national, if the competition model prevails. And consequently the price of producing news, the price of distributing news and the consumer price for purchasing it will go way down. But it is going to be harder for people to achieve brand identity and it will be harder to gather audiences.

NH: *But there's clearly a threat to diversity and the free flow of information, at least in the near term, of huge companies conglomerating into huger ones and swallowing up news organizations in the process.*

RH: Well, that's exactly right. And the key is to recognize that competition is not determined by whether firms are big or small but by how many there are in a market. For years in this country we operated under the view that there could be only three national TV networks. But in the digital broadcasting world you could have networks owned by ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox, Paramount, Disney, SEGA, the regional Bell companies, MCI, AT&T and others. And all of these firms would want to be in the business of communicating news because it's a great way to gather an audience. So it's very possible that five or ten years from now a primary source of news could be AT&T.

NH: *That's precisely the point. How disinterestedly will a news division owned by AT&T*

report on any malfeasances by the parent company — or even on its dealings before the FCC which, in fact, regulates it?

RH: Well, that may be the only Achilles heel the organization would have. But I can assure you, if you accept my model, that MCI would report accurately on AT&T over its network. Now this news network I am imagining for you might be one that would reach the audience of 50 million personal computers. It wouldn't necessarily focus as a business plan on reaching television sets as we know them today.

NH: *Legislation that will vastly alter the shape of our telecommunications in this country is making its way to President Clinton's desk as we speak. What do you think are a few of the vital ingredients it should contain?*

RH: First, it ought to give us and other agencies of government effective powers to make sure we institute and maintain competition in monopolized markets — forever. Number two, access to these networks, in significant part, should be open and available at a fair price. That's called the common carrier model. What I'm afraid of is that we will end up instead, possibly unintentionally, with a law that permits proprietary closed networks. Thirdly, this world of networks of networks is one that should include kids. These networks should reach every classroom and every library in the country. And that isn't going to happen by total adherence to principles of commercial exploitation of business opportunities. Because if pure market functions were going to give us networks in classrooms, we'd already have them. And we don't have them.

NH: *What's the FCC's responsibility if any with regard to broadcast news programs?*

RH: First of all, there are no requirements on the part of government that there be any news shows on. We don't monitor it, we don't count it, we're not aware of it other than hearing anecdotes about whether there's more on than ever before, or whether news coverage is now worse than ever. The practical reality is that the FCC has no role. One of the myths is that the FCC in some way promotes objective newsgathering, or considers news reporting as part of the licensing process. That is a complete myth. ♦

Increasingly the landscape is becoming a minefield of such hazards, and journalists are having a harder and harder time figuring out where they can safely walk. If *Time* magazine found cause for an exposé of AT&T, would it endanger a possible mega-deal between Time Warner and AT&T, thereby disgruntling the shareholders of both companies? And what if a reporter from either WNYW-TV in New York or the *New York Post* — both owned by Rupert Murdoch under a waiver of the cross-ownership rules — should turn up major improprieties at MCI Communications Inc., which recently forged a \$2 billion alliance with Murdoch's News Corp.? Or found hanky-panky at British Telecommunications, which owns 20 percent of MCI? The iron filings are forming fascinating patterns around fewer and fewer magnets. (Or magnets.)

With regard to much of this, the FCC is an interested bystander. But decisions are being made in Congress as well as at the FCC, says Andrew Schwartzman, executive director of the Media Access Project, that will "dramatically affect civic discourse for the coming generations, and the public is remarkably ill-informed and inadequately involved in this decision-making process." He laments "the failure of journalism as a whole to understand the importance of these issues and to explain them to their audience." Or even to apprehend their own ignorance about them. "The biggest shortcoming of American journalism," Schwartzman insists, "is coverage of itself."

The consequences for the public from this information gap are serious. A real danger exists, for example, that the U.S. can become a nation of informational haves and have-nots, as the new interactive cable and telephone gimcrackery becomes widely available in the next ten years. Those cyber-age systems will be wonderfully versatile and potentially enriching in their capacity to bring vast amounts of information, time-saving services, and entertainment straight into the home. They will not, however, come free of charge. Schools, libraries, museums, and hospitals that can't afford high user fees will be denied the full benefits of these miraculous new tools unless rules are written to control the tolls on the infohighway. Similarly, ethnic and racial minorities may be voiceless spectators in an otherwise informationally rumbustious world. Seemingly trifling matters such as the proposed lengthening of TV stations' license terms from five to ten years could affect the public negatively if those stations feel emboldened to shirk their legal obligation to offer educational shows for kids. A public well aware of such potholes on the road to our cyberfuture could make a difference.

Another example is the unprecedented auction

the FCC is conducting — the selling off of great chunks of the nation's airwaves to companies planning to use them for wireless telephone and computer networks. By the time they are finished the total is expected to reach an astonishing \$10 billion, a windfall that goes straight to the government's piggy bank, possibly to help decrease the federal deficit.

Surely, the most daunting bit of business before the FCC this year and for years to come is what to do about digital television. That's the hugely promising alternative to analog television (the system your TV set uses now) which originally was imagined as a conduit for high-definition TV but also permits the beaming of six or seven channels on the same bandwidth that currently sends only one. It's one of the most fantastical and dizzying prospects in broadcasting's seventy-five-year history. And it holds immense potential for enriching consumers' information bill of fare. For example, a digital TV-caster could simultaneously beam an all-news channel, an all-kids' channel, live sports events, a movie, a shopping channel, or anything else he could peddle to viewers and advertisers. He might transmit, in the pre-dawn hours, a half-dozen newspapers into the computers of subscribers, and even simulcast customized news programs for specific geographic areas within his signal range.

The FCC expects to approve the technical standard for digital TV by the end of August and when that happens manufacturers will start making television sets that can receive it. "Those TV's will hit the market at the beginning of 1997," Hundt predicts. "That means we have eighteen months in which to reinvent the broadcast industry and lay out the blueprint for a revolution."

That process raises big questions: What strings — if any — ought to be attached to these extraordinarily valuable new channels? What covenants, what promises? Should the new homesteaders be required to do public service as part of the deal: news programs, kids' shows, community affairs shows, and perhaps even free air time for candidates for public office? Should that fertile electronic farmland be auctioned to the highest bidders or simply handed over to the incumbent TV station owners? If TV stations do have first call, should they pay for the new channels? How much? And what happens to those vast stretches of vacated analog spectrum when broadcasters migrate completely to digital?

The old-line TV people, of course, feel that the new channels belong to them gratis as their birthright, and they'll bring the siege guns of the National Association of Broadcasters to bear on the Congress and the FCC to argue their case. One FCC official speaking on background recalls he was recently at a meeting where a TV station



Newton Minow recalls that his "vast wasteland" comment made news, but that the day-to-day slogging at the FCC didn't

owner said: "Oh, sure, the politicians are talking about selling these new channels instead of giving them to us, but we'll send our people over to Capitol Hill and put an end to that." Broadcasters are such a powerful lobby in Washington, said the FCC official, because they give air time on their local news shows to members of Congress. "And of course many newspapers around the country own television stations and so they have a vested interest in the outcome," he argues. "So you have here a huge story involving tens of billions of dollars — huge implications, the future of television at stake — and almost no one is reporting it."

"Journalists don't understand what the FCC is," says Newton Minow, President Kennedy's appointee to the chairmanship and the commission's most famous boss for having called television "a vast wasteland" back in 1961. The press has "no conception that everybody in America, every day, is affected by the FCC's decisions, whether they're using a cellular phone, being a ham radio operator, a fireman, a policeman. It's more important than most of the cabinet departments. If I had been given a choice by President Kennedy of being FCC chairman or head of one of the big departments, I would have taken the FCC because you're affecting everybody's life." And how well was *he* covered those three and a half decades ago? "If I was being very controversial or critical of television, then the press would give it enormous play. If I was working away at something important like communications satellites or educational television, there was either no coverage or it was on page eighty-six." The wasteland quote made big news, Minow points out, but day-to-day slogging "is not regarded as worthwhile."

Things haven't changed much, says Reed Hundt. "Most people in the print media have not figured out how to take these issues from the business page to other sections of the newspaper and to write about them in terms that — what Speaker Gingrich calls 'real people' — can understand." Probably the most fertile source of commentary, he says, has been *The Wall Street Journal* editorial page, which sports an irregular feature called Telecom. "They are cycling through their stable of revanchist writers."

"Probably the single most frustrating thing is when I read articles in *The New York Times* and other publications about this field and the reporters have never called," Hundt goes on. "They've never even asked us if we know anything, and sometimes — hold onto your hat — we do!" He admits that many of the impending changes are fiercely complex and defy easy explication. "So I don't feel critical of people in the media. They're not having any easier time than we are."

There are "some very smart people covering us," Hundt's chief of staff, Blair Levin, says. "But their job, particularly in the dailies, is to write an exciting story that's full of conflict and drama." The press's big mistake, he thinks, is too often putting things in terms of sporting events — horse races, winning and losing. "It misses the larger scope of what we're doing because we're not about that. We're about how do you get this incredibly important sector of the economy working in a way that the public interest is served. And that's not decided in a day or in a single decision."

Other coverage, he complains, is "dead wrong." A *Los Angeles Times* story on the auctions of airwaves stated that the bubble of euphoria about the sales had burst because many of the winning bidders were delaying payment. "It turned out that the number of people not paying was very small, smaller than you'd have at Christie's or Sotheby's," he claims. "The paper was saying, 'Oh, my God, the glass is only 95 percent full. It's 5 percent empty! Horrible! Awful! Scandal!'"

Reporters on the FCC beat tend to see things somewhat differently. Some top FCC staffers are "tightfisted" with information, says Jeannine Aversa, who covers the commission for *The Associated Press*. Extracting from them specifics of so simple a matter as what's on the agenda for the commissioners' monthly open meetings can be tiresome, she maintains; and they prefer that you report on their "cosmic concepts" for "making the world wonderful," more so than on close-to-the-ground, marketbasket effects of their policies. "So there's this constant struggle," she goes on. "They really want reporters to talk about their grand scheme. That gets so academic and so remote from people's lives." Still, she adds, the FCC is into so many new and exciting areas that "it's a great time to cover it."

"There's an oversensitivity at this commission that's unprecedented," laments a beat reporter, requesting anonymity. It's not unusual, says the reporter, to receive a phone call from a high-level staffer claiming inaccuracy and unfairness after a critical news article appears. "When you sit down with them, it turns out to be nothing." They work hard and try to do a good job, says the reporter, "but they have trouble acknowledging their mistakes." And what about Chairman Hundt? "He has the demeanor of an adversarial courtroom lawyer, which is what he was. He looks and talks like a guy who went to high school with Al Gore." Hundt does, in fact, stand accused of being both imperial and impolitic at times in running the FCC — a top-down command-and-control managerial style rather than consensus-seeking.

"Things are happening so quickly in the market-



Rupert Murdoch worried that Hundt "can hurt us and seems determined to do so," but the FCC backed off



place, regulatory-wise and technologically, that it's difficult to get a grip on it," says Jeff Baumann, executive vice president and general counsel of the NAB. "I don't think the public is aware and I don't think the Congress and the FCC have taken time to reflect on what these innovations really mean." It may be that the public doesn't care, Baumann says, but they don't really have enough information to know if they should care or not. "Maybe nobody has the ability to convey to the American people what this might mean in ten or fifteen years."

Recently, though, the press was more than eager to report fully on a crucial matter before the FCC and ran up against what reporters called a "gag order" imposed by Chairman Hundt. "No party to the case could talk to the press and no documents were available," says one. "It seemed clearly an overstepping of his bounds." Rupert Murdoch's Australia-based News Corporation — parent of the Fox television network — was being investigated to see if it had misled the commission in 1985 when it purchased six Metromedia television stations. Under long-standing rules, foreigners are precluded from controlling TV stations in the U.S.

A mini-storm of controversy over the gag order erupted. David Bartlett, president of the 4,000-member Radio-Television News Directors Association, threatened possible legal action. FCC commissioner Quello called Hundt's action a "star chamber" proceeding and said it had "undermined" the agency's credibility. He also asserted that the order shouldn't have been issued without consulting the other commissioners, and complained he'd been denied access to documents pertaining to the case.

Asked about the instance, Hundt responds with an edge of impatience: "Number one, it wasn't a gag order, and of course no reporter bothered to call me and ask me about it." What was it then? "It's called a confidentiality order. There are somewhere in the nature of hundreds of thousands issued by courts every year in this country and they're designed to protect the confidentiality of the disclosures made by the parties to assure the integrity of an investigation." You don't care for the term "gag order?" I inquired. "Not only don't I care for it," Hundt shot back, "it is utterly inaccurate. Reporters in Washington — and this is no big surprise — like to cover political controversy. Any allegation gets covered. The problem here is we are trying to cope with brand new issues that are incredibly important to the country and we would very much benefit from public discussion of them." But — observers pointed out — the "confidentiality order" quite effectively had inhibited such public discussion.

Subsequently, on April 21, 1995, the *Los*

Angeles Times reported that the FCC was indeed considering forcing News Corporation to reduce its stake in each of its U.S. stations from 99 percent to the legal 25 percent — a move that could cost the company hundreds of millions in capital gains taxes. In obvious agitation, Rupert Murdoch fired off a statement denying any misfeasance and claiming that the whole matter "has been directed and controlled by the FCC chairman — even to the point of excluding other commissioners." He accused Hundt of "acting as both prosecutor and judge and using clearly prejudicial procedures." And his parting shot: "Given Mr. Hundt's reputation, we have been reluctant to speak out. God knows he can hurt us and seems determined to do so." In early May, however, the commission backed off on the ground that the rules about foreign ownership had been unclear at the time Murdoch bought his American stations in 1985. Some FCC adepts ridiculed the agency's retreat as a failure to act forcefully in a case where compliance with the law (in their view) clearly was being bent. Eleven days later the whole matter became moot when Fox Television Stations Inc. announced it had found a tax-free way to restructure, and was doing so in the effort to satisfy the commission's concerns.

A major area of concern for many FCC-watchers is protection of the public interest — long the bedrock of American broadcasting. "The commission isn't doing anything about that," worries the Rev. Everett C. Parker, former head of the Office of Communication of the United Church of Christ. "They're getting rid of regulations and letting these various media operate as they please," he insists. "There's no effort to enforce a responsibility to do anything in the public interest." Handing over additional spectrum to broadcasters is "criminal," he says, because impecunious minority and advocacy groups will be foreclosed from becoming players in broadcasting. Those channels will be gone for good, he claims, as when public land is sold. For his part, Hundt insists he is indeed committed to defending the public's stake in all this. Last year, he promised he'd "redefine, restate, and renew the social compact between the public and the broadcasting industry."

Parker is a long-time defender of the Fairness Doctrine, which—until it was abolished during the Reagan years — obliged station owners as a condition of license renewal to seek out and air opposing views on controversial matters of public importance. "Now we have all these talk radio shows spewing out hatred and no possibility of getting another viewpoint on," he says. When you ask a station manager for rebuttal time, Parker insists, the answer is: "Why should I? These shows grab big audiences and sell lots of products."



Newt
Gingrich
would like
to "phase out
the FCC
in three
to five
years"

Chairman Hundt opposes reinstituting the Fairness Doctrine: "This isn't the time to be dwelling on the scarcity of voices," he says. "It's the time to be finding ways to maximize the number of outlets. An aggressive competition policy is the cure for all of the evils the Fairness Doctrine was designed to address."

After the April 19 Oklahoma City tragedy in which 168 were killed by anti-government terrorists, President Clinton attacked the evils of "loud and angry voices in America" that were fueling civil unrest via talk radio. His words prompted speculation that the FCC might crack down on right-wing talkathons. But the commission's response was that the First Amendment and the 1934 Communications Act forbade any such action. Even when the Watergate co-conspirator and radio host G. Gordon Liddy advised his listeners on shooting federal agents in legally justified self-defense, the FCC said its hands were tied "in the absence of evidence of clear and present danger of imminent violence." That also goes for public access cable (under the amended Cable Act of 1984), making the world of cable TV safe for programs like *Race & Reason*, an anti-black, anti-Jewish program decorated by a Nazi swastika and Confederate flag. The FCC is, however, looking into possible rules violations relating to a shortwave radio program (rebroadcast on some commercial stations), *The Intelligence Report*, conducted by Mark Koernke, the Michigan militiaman whose anti-government rants came to public view in the wake of the Oklahoma City bombing. As reported by *Broadcasting & Cable*, the program may violate radio rules that require shortwave programs to be aimed at audiences outside the United States.

The FCC actually does have its toe in the water of content regulation, insists the RTNDA's Bartlett, "in ways we think either violate the First Amendment or come awfully close." Newspapers and magazines, for example, can editorialize for or against political candidates all they like, but radio and TV stations are obliged by law to offer air time for reply. "Our members are united in one thing," Bartlett says, "and that's that government should butt out of the editorial business."

But most experts resist abolishing the FCC altogether. One of the most respected theorists in telecommunications is Henry Geller, fellow at the Markle Foundation, senior fellow at The Annenberg Washington Program, former general counsel to the FCC, and onetime assistant secretary of commerce, who believes the commission is moving too slowly "to unscrew the system" and is horrified by the commission's micromanaging of the cable industry but sees any effort to abolish the

FCC as a "crazy idea." Especially now, as the historic transition from monopoly to full competition in the cable and telephone industries is under way. The NAB's Baumann concurs. Despite what anybody thinks of the commission and its efforts to make the trains run on time, Baumann insists, "there's always going to be a need for an organization like the FCC." Janice Obuchowski, president of Freedom Technologies and a former head of the White House's National Telecommunications and Information Administration says, "You can never overstate the role of the FCC. It's where the rubber meets the road on all of these information highway and globalization issues."

"I predict 1995 will be the end of the first era of television and the beginning of the second," Reed Hundt has ventured. The mantra for the new era is "competition," intoned hundreds of times a day by devotees in the great ashram of the new information order. And competition does indeed hold out the promise of greater choice and lower costs for consumers. It may, however, be competition between more gigantic — and fewer — players than ever before, in a concentration of power that will "make Citizen Kane look like an underachiever," in Representative Edward Markey's words.

As long ago as 1929 the Federal Radio Commission (predecessor to the FCC) decided that broadcast stations were "licensed to serve the public and not for the purpose of furthering the private or selfish interests of individuals or groups of individuals. The standard of public interest, convenience, or necessity means nothing if it does not mean this." That statement seems merely quaint today as wired and wireless superfluity of conduits replaces scarcity and the public's birthright of spectrum is at risk of being sold off like a mess of pottage. What's good for Bell Atlantic and Viacom and ABC may or may not be good for the country — to recall GM president "Engine" Charlie Wilson's famous epigram from the 1950s. Right now decisions are being made and contemplated that will be irrevocable and will profoundly affect for generations the lives of individuals and corporations. Who will speak for the public to help assure that the palpable benefits of the New Cyberia will not be denied those less able to pay — the poor, as well as libraries, schools, museums, and hospitals? Or have the people no standing in an increasingly privatized world except as they are allowed to vote with their pocketbooks — as consumers of an immense, new, seductive array of goods and services in the great electronic shopping mall under construction? And will the people be denied what they need to know about this by a press increasingly subsumed in the vested and conflicting self-interests of merged mega-corporations? ♦



Hundt's FCC
is accused
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The Next Round of Health Care Hotspots

More than 50 million Americans have enrolled in HMOs, and 50 million more are expected to sign up by the year 2000. For a flat monthly fee the HMOs cover all necessary care and decide which care is necessary and who delivers it. Most provide good service at a decent price, but employers who pay premiums are demanding more cost-cutting. In some regions, HMOs have already squeezed pay for doctors and hospitals about all they can, and are tightening rules for patients. As competitive pressures spawn "horror stories," journalists may find themselves called upon to investigate.

Here are some typical scenarios that reporters will be called upon to sort out:

- A young mother needs a tricky operation for a rare tumor. The HMO surgeon has done it only once or twice. The patient wants a surgeon with more experience, but the plan says no.
- A woman who wants to visit her parents fifty miles away during her eighth month of pregnancy finds her HMO will not permit her to do so. If she goes anyway and labor begins, the hospital bills won't be covered.
- A man is struck by chest pains as he's dressing for work. His wife calls paramedics, who take him to the emergency room. When it turns out not to be a heart attack, the HMO won't pay.

Reporters should head first for the nearest medical school library to look up *The Managed Health Care Handbook* by Peter R. Kongstvedt, *HMO Magazine*, and the health policy reports by John K. Iglehart in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, July 7 and October 27, 1994. (Anything written before 1993 is obsolete.) Also, the Group Health Association of America offers a wealth of information on the HMO industry and individual companies. Their media contact is Don White (202 778-3274).

Here are some other useful resources:

- Forms that show profits and other financial information from publicly traded HMOs are available from the Securities and Exchange Commission. Proxy statements or annual reports often show executive salaries. Nonprofit HMOs must make available to the public a great deal of financial information at their offices. Ask for IRS Forms 1023/24 and 990.
- In many states, the insurance department has public records on HMOs that enable you to figure out what percent of the premium dollar is being spent on health care and how much is going to administrative salaries, marketing, and profits.
- Also ask the insurance department for the plan's complaint ratio. That is the number of complaints, divided by enrollment. You may have to do the computing yourself.
- State and local agencies that contract with HMOs for care of government employees or Medicaid patients should have figures on "disenrollment," how many members resigned from the plan. By comparing that number to the enrollment, you can get a good measure of dissatisfaction.
- Check court files, but don't be unduly impressed if a plan has never been sued. Federal law and court opinions shield HMOs from lawsuits in most cases.
- Call the National Committee for Quality Assurance in Washington to find out the plan's accreditation status and whether any HEDIS measurements are available for your region (HEDIS, short for Health Plan-Employer Data and Information Set, is a core set of performance measures).

If you're looking into a specific type of HMO complaint, try the state agency charged with investigating them — usually the Department of Insurance, but sometimes Health or Corporations. Some states, including Florida, Washington, and Texas, allow reporters access to the files or provide names of people who have had specific types of HMO trouble. However, many states won't give reporters access. If that's the case in your state, try:

- Files in a state that permits access and in which the HMO does business, especially its headquarters.
- Health care rights organizations, if there are any in your state. If not, try activist groups such as Families USA or Consumers Union.
- Your own newspaper or TV station's consumer complaint office (often called Action Line). Many calls and letters come in there, and only a few of them ever get on the air or in print. If a certain HMO is causing trouble, the trend may show up there.

If one HMO draws a lot of complaints, it may be turning doctors into double agents. While the old-line HMOs paid doctors discounted fees or on salary, the new guys play hardball. Large bonuses go to the most frugal. Or part of doctors' pay is withheld until the end of the year to see if they've met guidelines. Riskiest of all is "physician capitation" — that is, giving each doctor a pot of money, based on the number of patients, that is supposed to cover part or all the cost of their care. If capitated doctors come in under that ceiling, they keep the difference. If they spend more, they lose money. Capitation has led to a frenzy of cost-cutting by providers who have their own bank accounts on the line. Patients who are being subjected to this danger deserve to know it, yet most HMOs keep it a secret. To get this story:

- Find a doctor who quit the HMO and isn't intimidated by the HMO's gag clause.
- Call the state medical association. Some are collecting and analyzing contracts.
- Cultivate faculty at the state school of public health. They can lead you to obscure industry and academic journals that have examples of HMO contracts with doctors and help you to understand them.
- If it seems to take federal, state, and local agencies a long time to act on complaints, it may be because they believe HMOs are saving them money on Medicare and Medicaid patients, and they don't want to rock the boat. Such conflicts of interest could result in:
- Agencies that are eager to place patients in cheap health plans dropping requirements for accreditation, a state license, or financial reserves.
- Officials failing to check the criminal, civil, and professional records of those who apply for contracts or HMO licenses.
- Warnings issued for years that don't result in any discipline.

A caveat for the zealous reporter: if all you ever hear is complaints about HMOs, you may develop tunnel vision. Many HMOs are fulfilling their promise to emphasize preventive care. Other innovative HMO programs are reducing fraud in workers' compensation and even preventing accidents. If HMOs in your area are doing these things, they deserve applause. If they're not, ask why. ♦

Carol Gentry

Carol Gentry, medical writer for the St. Petersburg Times, is conducting research on managed care at Harvard University through a yearlong grant from the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation.

Pulp Nonfiction



Capital punishment is back: Can death-beat baby-boomers uphold the traditions of the immortal *Front Page*?

Nostalgic types in the news business have long been concerned that the gritty, blue-collar spirit of *The Front Page* reporter is dead — killed off by a lethal injection of overeducation, high pay, and elitist airs. This fear that something vibrant is being lost dates at least to the 1928 play: in its stage directions, ace *Chicago Herald Examiner* reporter Hildy Johnson, the main character, is billed as “a vanishing type — the lusty, hoodlumesque half-drunken caballero that was the newspaperman of our youth. Schools of journalism and the advertising business have nearly extirpated the species.” Lately, dwindling circulation has stoked a more pragmatic anxiety: that reporters have become too upscale and erudite to connect with just plain folks.

But hold on. There’s good news: capital punishment is back and execution stories — the very essence of *The Front Page*, in which the plot hinges on a scheduled hanging — are again becoming a mainstay. Nothing captures the public mind so completely as a ritualized killing. And — skeptics be damned — today’s upscale reporters show signs of being up to *Front Page* standards — as witness execution coverage of murderer Thomas Grasso (whom New York Governor George Pataki shipped to the Oklahoma death house, keeping a campaign vow). The death-beat baby boomers did not meet every *Front Page* benchmark. But, overcoming such handicaps as grad school education, they displayed a skill that would have made their forebears proud in tapping the large eye-for-an-eye market.

A visually spectacular execution is of course a plus in tapping that market. In one film version of the play, Walter Matthau, portraying Hildy’s tyrannical editor Walter Burns,

delivers a soliloquy on headlines he could have written, if only the electric chair rather than a gallows were available for convict Earl Williams: “WILLIAMS FRIES! . . . WILLIAMS ROASTED ALIVE!” In this regard, the Grasso reporters faced a handicap: he died by lethal injection, the dullest

way to go. Thus a *New York Post* reporter could only write that Grasso’s death was “no more dramatic than watching a veterinarian put a sick animal to sleep.” The headline screamed WITNESS TO ANIMAL’S LAST BREATH, but the reality was flat.

Luckily the supposed humaneness of lethal injection provided a foil to retain the audience. For instance, *The Daily Oklahoman* (KILLER’S DEATH CONTRASTS WITH VICTIM’S) reported: “The sight of Grasso in his sleeplike position offered a stark contrast to the graphic photos of Hilda [no relation to Hildy] Johnson of Tulsa, lying dead . . .” The AP declared, “It was a stark contrast to the strangulation of Johnson, who was found Christmas Day 1990, . . . one eye jarred open by death.” The implication was that injection is not gruesome enough and that a kind of reverse golden rule should apply — doing unto the convict exactly what he has done to others — which, taken to its logical extreme, would mean that if Grasso throws a man off a skyscraper, we throw him off. Walter Burns would have a field day: GRASSO IS GOO!!

Grasso reporters also showed their mettle by performing a kind of *Front Page* Punch and Judy rite — jeering at the

Christopher Hanson is Washington correspondent for the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* and a contributing editor of *CJR*.

convict, hitting him with punch lines. (In the play, one paper makes Williams a figure of fun with the thin-air story that he planned to wed a prostitute on the scaffold.) With Grasso, much of the ridicule involved food — a topic that is big by tradition, the last meal menu being a detail that is nearly always available and of interest. Grasso had come up with a very specific last meal request: his pasta to be served at room temperature in a sixteen-ounce can, his mango to be medium size, mussels to be on the half shell, cheeseburger to be from

Burger King, with lettuce, tomato, onions, mustard, and mayonnaise, etc. The menu gave rise to a press theme — Grasso-as-glutton — and to derision in papers from Texas to New York, where a *Buffalo News* reporter, responding to Grasso's request for half a pumpkin pie, observed: "Half? Tom. Babe. Go for the whole. What's the worry? Indigestion later on?" This jest was repeated nearly verbatim in the same space two weeks later, back by popular demand.

Above all, Grasso wanted SpaghettiOs. When he was instead

given spaghetti to go, he became upset and issued his last public statement before execution: "Please tell the media, I did not get my SpaghettiOs." This was the ultimate Grasso-as-glutton anecdote and the media ate it up. In fact, *Newsweek* and *People* carried reports focusing only on SpaghettiOs.

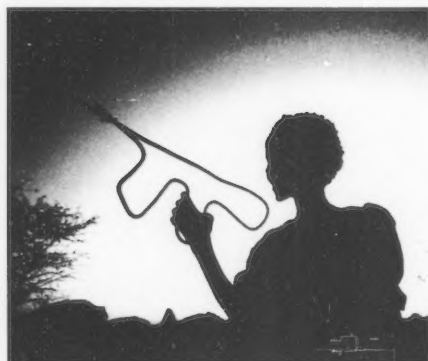
For the reporters in the play, exaggeration in defense of front-page placement is no vice. When Williams escapes, hides in a roll-top desk in the nearby press room, and is arrested unarmed without a fight, reporters phone in such updates as: "Williams put up a desperate struggle . . . Williams tried to shoot it out, but his gun wouldn't work . . ."

The Grasso reporters proved to be factually challenged as well, but in their case the errors served to hype the size of Grasso's appetite. *Newsday* said Grasso was standing by a request for spare ribs, despite a prison hand-out indicating the order had been struck from a downsized menu; *The Daily Oklahoman* insisted he was demanding two milkshakes when he had halved the order; the New York *Daily News* reported accurately that Grasso had cut his mussel order from twenty-four to twelve, but, then, on the same page of the same March 19 edition, reasserted that he was demanding twenty-four. London's *Daily Mirror* claimed Grasso requested "a can of Coke, a bottle of lemonade, and a tub of ice cream" and wanted his mussels "in broth flavored with beer, rosemary, and cumin." A copy of Grasso's proposed menu makes no mention of any of these items. Asked where he got his data, reporter Allan Hall replied: "It must have been an American paper. All I do is troll through American papers . . . I just can't recall."

What of the concern that today's reporters have moved too far above Hildy Johnson on the erudition ladder and are culturally disconnected from readers? How wide is this divide? Thanks to Thomas Grasso, we now have a better idea. On Grasso's last day of life, he released to the media two statements on time and death: "What we call the beginning is often the end, and to make an end is to make a beginning. The end is where we start from."

SOMALIA, RWANDA, AND BEYOND

*The Role of the
International
Media in Wars and
Humanitarian Crises*



A special report by **CROSSLINES Global Report**, the independent newsjournal on international humanitarian action, development, and world trends, and the Italian Academy for Advanced Studies at Columbia University.

Based on a 1994 media workshop on Somalia organized by the Italian Academy, *Somalia, Rwanda and Beyond* is an expanded and updated perspective with essays and first-person accounts by key journalists, relief professionals, and others. The book explores the problems, and challenges confronted by foreign correspondents, television crews, and photographers covering today's wars and humanitarian predicaments. It seeks to examine the media's often close, and at times compromising relationship to the international relief community in its quest to report such issues.

Contributors include, among others: Gordon Adam (BBC), Louis Boccardi (AP), Rony Brauman (Médecins sans Frontières), Furio Colombo (La Repubblica), Richard Dowden (The Economist), William Dowell (TIME), Pierre Gassmann (International Committee of the Red Cross), Richard Lyman (Philadelphia Inquirer), Staffan De Mistura (UNICEF), Donatella Lorch (New York Times), Andrew Nibley (Reuters), Charles Norchi (International League for Human Rights), Dan Rather (CBS), Mort Rosenblum (AP), Sir Brian Urquhart (Ford Foundation).

Somalia, Rwanda and Beyond is available for \$15.00 plus postage.

For orders or further information, please contact:

• Ms. Sue Pfiffner, **CROSSLINES Global Report**, P.O. Box 171, CH-1211, Geneva 20, Switzerland. Tel: Geneva 41 (22) 756-1984 Fax: Pizy 41 (21) 808-5830.

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Somalia, Rwanda and Beyond is dedicated to those killed reporting recent wars and other crises. Proceeds (\$2.00 per copy) will go to the International Centre for Humanitarian Reporting.

And: "For most of us there is only the unattended moment, the moment in and out of time. And right action is freedom from the past and future also." Some reporters seemed unimpressed ("often-rambling," said *The Dallas Morning News*) but most decided to give Grasso his say. For instance, *The New York Times* (AS DEATH NEARS, INMATE SAYS HE SEES A NEW BEGINNING) led off its pre-execution story: "In an enigmatic final statement, scribbled on a piece of paper and handed to prison officials here at 3:15 . . . , Thomas J. Grasso said, 'What we call the beginning . . .'"

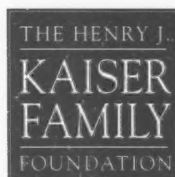
The next day reporters were forced to acknowledge what a literature professor had phoned the prison to report — that these passages were by T.S. Eliot, not T.J. Grasso. Far from identifying the lines, the journalists failed to draw an obvious conclusion based on style: that the person who composed the rest of the verbiage issued by Grasso to the media on execution day (e.g., a doggerel verse: ". . . As the poison drips into my veins/And from my body life does drain/I'll know then, once and for all/what 'last call' means/when serving 'toxahol'"") could not conceivably have composed those passages about time. Grasso had seized an opportunity to play Gotcha from the grave. As his lawyer, Johnie O'Neal, explained: Grasso (who admired Eliot and looked down on the news media) "felt certain reporters would take those quotations and not know where they came from and make some statement that would reveal a little bit about the person's training and background." It was almost as if Grasso were modeling himself on Walter Burns, who plays an analogous joke in the play: when Hildy quits to get married after a last scoop, Burns gives him his watch, then reports it stolen.

Grasso's stunt was embarrassing but also reassuring: we are not as disconnected from Joe Sixpack as some had feared when it comes to high culture.

Joe Sixpack may not be erudite, but he does have an empathetic side and a curiosity about people. Here the yuppie-reporters failed him, for in most

of their portrayals the convict remained a cartoon figure, with many questions left unanswered. Why, for instance, did Grasso have his heart set on SpaghettiOs? When he was eleven, says O'Neal, he opened a can and found only eight meatballs, when there should have been twelve. He wrote to complain and Franco-American sent him four free cans. In ordering SpaghettiOs for his last meal, Grasso was hoping to relive one of the few moments of success and happiness in his life. Few readers got any inkling of this.

Where the Grasso reporters fell short was in forgetting that there is more than one *Front Page* tradition: in addition to tapping the agony market the play's reporters tap the compassion market. They first pigeon-hole Williams as a snarling bolshevik murderer, but eventually determine he may be innocent and help prevent his execution. Hildy professes to be "a bum! Without any feelings!! And that's all I want to be!" but by curtain time he has displayed more than a glimmer of humanity on the job. That is nothing to be afraid of. ♦



Announces

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Six journalists have been selected as 1995 Kaiser Media fellows:

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Leon Dash, reporter, *The Washington Post*

Project: Six generations of underclass life in a family.

Jonathan Freedman, author, columnist; freelance contributor, *Los Angeles Times* Commentary Page

Project/s: Comprehensive child-development programs — a television documentary profiling families who overcome poverty; prostate cancer — a book empowering men to confront treatment dilemmas and make healthy choices.

Judith Graham, business writer, *The Denver Post*

Project: The restructuring of the health care industry.

Lani Luciano, staff writer, *Money* magazine

Project: Medical quality measures — how real, how useful, how welcome?

Patricia Neighmond, health policy correspondent, *National Public Radio*

Project: Managed care — its implications for patients and their doctors; and the economics of health care.

In 1996, the Kaiser Media Fellowships Program will again award up to six fellowships a year to print, television and radio journalists and editors interested in health policy and public health. Applications for the 1996 program will be available shortly, for submission by March 1996. The aim is to provide health journalists with a highly flexible range of opportunities to pursue individual projects related to health policy and public health issues.

For more information, or to apply for the 1996 awards, write to:

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The Bill Gates Factor

Bill Kovach, the brilliant former editor who now heads the Nieman fellowship program at Harvard, recently hosted Nieman's second annual conference "to address the issues raised by the popularization of new media."

"Look around this room," said Kovach in his greeting, "and you will see gathered here enough intelligence and influence to shape the future of our profession." Maybe so, but what was represented to the gathering on that first afternoon as "new media" was not new media at all, but old media — old, old media.

Jim Steele, half of the team that reported and produced the spectacular, 75,000-word *Philadelphia Inquirer* series "America: What Went Wrong," and Maxwell King, editor of the *Inquirer*, told how the newspaper went about gathering the information for the series.

And then the conference was shown what purported to be how "America: What Went Wrong," published in 1991, would look "if produced now? In five years? In ten years? In twenty years? What new tools will be available? How will various media merge?" Et cetera.

Except that the new media version was just old media repackaged or, to use a buzzword of this new world, "repurposed." We saw various parts of the series from the *Inquirer* as they would look on a computer screen. Digestible bite-sized pieces of the series, with separate headlines for various segments. Basically, we saw words on a screen.

We were not told how the *Inquirer's* reporters might have gone about their reporting differently (and perhaps more deeply) if they knew they could incorporate video and moving graphics and charts so that we could all follow along better. We could have heard and seen some of the interviews. The reporting and the articles themselves would have become even more alive, even more powerful than the extraordinary printed version.

"America: What Went Wrong" might start with a middle-class American talking head-on into a camera, telling us poignantly how his life-style plummeted during the Reagan years. And then the next character might be Jim Steele, the narrator, explaining what the article (series) would tell us, and showing us a moving graphic of how economic indicators changed (with not just bars on a graph ascending, but showing video of these things — the components of the gross domestic product, for example) and with Steele saying, "push button here" to read the text of an appropriate law, with key parts highlighted in different colors. And on and on — a melding of text and video

and sound and more. Viewers/readers/listeners could make it even more relevant by plugging in their own personal information to see how their situations compare with those of the people interviewed in the *Inquirer* story.

"Media" is a plural noun. New media are simply new ways — plural — of communicating. Some new ways are with us already, some are developing now. Some are and will be quality journalism; some are and will be more glitzy than substance.

People who understand all the possibilities and are working to bring them about "get it," as they like to say. A lot of people at the Nieman gathering — and throughout traditional journalism — clearly don't. Among people who do "get it" are Bill Gates, chairman of Microsoft (who *really* gets it) and Rupert Murdoch of News Corp.

What new media will offer are opportunities to do our job — telling stories — using more and more tools. Some have not been envisioned yet, even by Bill Gates. But he will certainly be wherever the technology takes him. The question is whether any top journalists will be there as well.

According to Gates, the next powerful tool available in this "multi-media" universe, within three or four years, will be full-motion video — television delivered to your computer screen via ultra-high-speed links.

The inclusion of video, said the owner of The Microsoft Network this spring, "is the future." He was announcing a deal with NBC, which will make its news and other programming available later this summer exclusively on The Microsoft Network in some form or another — whatever NBC and Microsoft invent together. "This is the hot area," said Gates, adding that the on-line world has "got to change in order to move away from just simply dumping text that came from other places and having that be what's up there. If on-line's going to succeed, it'll succeed because it's generating big numbers and because it's justifying people doing unique work there."

Here is a conversation I had recently with a young executive from Microsoft Corp. about the nascent Microsoft news service. We're talking about whether "MSN," as it's being called at Microsoft headquarters, spells the beginning of the end for journalism as we know it.

"Of course not," says the Microsoft whiz kid. "The news service will have only sixty people or so. We'll just

Stephen D. Isaacs is a professor and associate dean of Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism and co-chair of the university's Center for New Media.

be a delivery system, a distribution mechanism, the new carrier boy. We'll be repackaging news in new and interesting ways, maybe, but not covering it, not originating content."

That's the Microsoft line. "But once you get into it," I ask, "you'll obviously see better ways to tell stories, no?"

"Yeah, sure," replies the whiz kid, whose experience includes work at small newspapers.

"So that means you'll soon be in the news origination business, right?"

He smiles, knowingly. "Sure," he says.

Gates's network is scheduled to make its debut this August as an integral part of Microsoft's new operating system, Windows 95. The network will have, as Gates describes it, "a critical mass" of services (news will be just one of many) available to the tens of millions of people who are expected to buy the new software. Gates plans to make the Microsoft Network available around the world in twenty languages simultaneously. (The Justice Department is looking

into the question of antitrust violations in the new venture.)

As mentioned earlier, Gates is not the only billionaire who "gets it." His worldwide network will be challenged by Rupert Murdoch, who, on top of buying up television stations and networks and satellite delivery systems across Europe and Asia and Latin America, is now affiliated with MCI, America's second largest long-distance company, which has bought more than 10 percent of Murdoch's company. He has hired away Mark Benerofe, a former CNN producer and Prodigy executive who had been creating Gates's news network, to build one for him instead on Delphi, his on-line service, which is now the fourth biggest after CompuServe, America Online, and Prodigy. (Once the Microsoft network comes on line, Delphi will slip to fifth.) Murdoch, after all, already controls Fox Television and Twentieth Century Fox and HarperCollins, and the largest single share of the newspaper circulation in England and Australia. MCI's chairman, Bert C. Roberts, told a reporter recently, "Think of the incredible range of news and entertainment we can offer."

Yes, think of it.

Murdoch and Gates and their ilk foresee a new news business. They understand enough of the emerging technological advances to wager hundreds of millions of dollars that their visions are correct.

Maybe enough good journalists who "get it" will gravitate to Gates, Murdoch, et al. to assure quality new media from those sources; but the betting here is that it won't happen. If the tech people and their marketers call the important shots, they aren't likely to put out any 75,000-word exposés. To reach the largest possible audience, their criterion is much more likely to be the lowest common denominator. "New media," sure, but with the emphasis on its glitz.

Meanwhile, what will become of traditional journalists and their institutions? If they manage to "get it," they and their standards can survive in a new and exciting form. ♦

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Esquire



The Crazy Days of Harold Hayes

by Robert Smith

Esqire magazine under Harold Hayes, who ran it from 1961 to 1973, was as distinctive as its oversized pages. When the magazine shrank to the conventional 8 1/2 X 11 in 1971, its impact diminished as well: the institutional loss of nerve may have had its effect.

Hayes, the son of a Baptist minister, grew up in West Virginia and North Carolina. He graduated from Wake Forest, where he edited a prize-winning student magazine. After two years in the Marines and a stint with United Press in Atlanta, he looked for magazine work in New York and found it at *Pageant*, "a low-budget *Reader's Digest*," Carol Polsgrove calls it. Hayes learned magazines from Harris Shevelson, the editor, who asked his undereditors to come up with a hundred article ideas every other week.

A friend put Hayes in touch with Arnold Gingrich, the founding editor and then publisher of *Esquire*. After their second interview, in 1956, Gingrich wrote later, "I took him in like the morning paper." Five years later, after Gingrich had turned the magazine over to Ralph Ginzburg (who was soon fired) and Clay Felker, he picked Hayes as managing editor. (Felker bounced back famously to edit a supplement to the *New York Herald Tribune* that became *New York magazine*.)

Under Hayes the magazine took off. Readers of this chronicle of the Hayes years are invited to consider how much of his and the magazine's success had to do with the luck of the draw: it had the sixties to work with. But that's always a question with no definitive answer: every editor has his times to contend with, like a swim-

mer in shifting currents that could carry him toward or away from where he wants to go.

In putting together her lively and readable book, Polsgrove, who teaches journalism at Indiana University, interviewed fifty people and sifted through a great many

**IT WASN'T PRETTY, FOLKS,
BUT DIDN'T WE HAVE FUN?
ESQUIRE IN THE SIXTIES**

BY CAROL POLSGROVE
W.W. NORTON
336 PP. \$27.50.

letters, memos, and other personal papers belonging to Hayes, Gordon Lish, and others. She has a good story to tell, and she makes the most of it.

Like the best editors, Hayes displayed gifts for picking good people and letting them work — although he had his own ideas of what they should do. He made the decision, unthinkable for most editors, to give George Lois absolute control over covers — Hayes had no final say in creating them and couldn't veto them (at least, not more than once). The results were provocative and visually stunning photographs: a Christmas cover of Sonny Liston glowering malevolently beneath a Santa cap; Lt. William Calley, accused in the My Lai massacre, posing with Vietnamese children.

Hayes called himself apolitical and apersonal. His passion was the magazine and its possibilities. In its service he could be controlling, even overbearing.

When Thomas B. Morgan, who had written forty pieces for *Esquire*, asked Hayes for a raise from \$1,350 to \$1,500, Hayes said no; only Norman Mailer got \$1,500 — and "Norman Mailer is going to win the Nobel Prize." Hayes offered \$1,450. Morgan pressed, arguing that he received \$6,000 from *Life*, \$4,000 from *Look* — this was in 1963 — but he loved *Esquire*. The editor was more than firm: "When I die and they're lowering me into my grave, just before they close my casket, my last words are going to be, 'Fourteen-fifty for Morgan, fifteen hundred for Mailer.'" Editor Hayes, with the head of art director Benton under his left arm



Robert Smith, a former managing editor of *CJR* and *TV Guide*, has just completed *Saving the Wolves*, his first novel.

CJR JULY/AUGUST 1995



Editorial staff 1968. Front row (left to right, sitting): Tom Hedley, Harold Hayes, Arnold Gingrich, Chip Tolbert. Second row (left to right): John Berendt, Richard Joseph, Bob Brown, Cathie McBride, Virginia Reilly, Sam Antupit, Alice Glaser, Don Erickson. Third row (left to right): Sheila Berger, George Frazier IV, Tom Ferrell, Jill Goldstein, Bob Sherrill.

er.” Morgan never wrote for the magazine again. But Tom Wolfe did, along with Gay Talese, Garry Wills, and Michael Herr.

Esquire was often more lavish with expenses than fees. Hayes dispatched an editor to India to spend a week with Allen Ginsberg; Talese spent three months reporting and editing his justly celebrated “Frank Sinatra Has a Cold”; and Hayes himself indulged in a trip to Paris and London to try to persuade Samuel Beckett, Jean Genet, William Burroughs, and Eugene Ionesco to cover the 1968 Democratic convention. (*Esquire* had always been grandiose in its editorial ambitions. Even Hayes and Felker had once felt that it was fruitless to try to approach French president Charles de Gaulle to write about honor. Founding editor Gingrich’s curt comment: “Let De Gaulle do his own refusing.” De Gaulle said yes.)

Hayes succeeded in signing up Burroughs and Genet, to the horror, as it turned out, of *Esquire*’s business side, which seems to have spent much of the sixties viewing the filler around its ads with mounting alarm, distaste, annoyance — and, to their credit, forbearance.

But Genet surely tested them, and provided one benchmark of how

“Magazine editing,” wrote Hayes, “is not just the act of choosing, it is an act of assertion.”

Esquire was shaped by its times. The magazine dispatched a team of heavy-hitting writers to Chicago in the summer of 1968: not only Burroughs and Genet, but Terry Southern and John Sack as well, with editor John Berendt along as babysitter. Of course the writers became part of the scene, speaking at a Yippie press conference, shadowed by a plain-clothesman.

Then the pieces came in — and Hayes published them. William Bur-

roughs produced a satire in which a purple baboon named Senator Homer Mandrill runs for president and delivers racist diatribes. And Genet, seizing his chance to *épater les bourgeois américains*, offered this description of a Chicago cop: “The thighs are very beautiful beneath the blue cloth, thick and muscular. . . . His legs are long, and perhaps, as you approach his member, you would find a furry nest of long, tight, curly hair.” He saw another police officer “holding his billy club in his hand the way, exactly the way, I hold a black American’s member.”

“Rough going” was how Hayes diplomatically described this copy in a memo to the business side, which accepted his reasons for insisting the pieces run as written. Hayes acknowledged that he owed much of his freedom to publisher Gingrich, who was an assiduous and tolerant reader of all copy. Commenting on a particularly forbidding short story manuscript, he scribbled to Hayes: “The only parts of this I could understand were 6, 7, 9, 13, 15, 17, 19, 22, 24, 27, 29 & 31. No objection to them. In fact, if another person than Gordon [Lish, the fiction editor] can understand the other sections, I have no objection to them either. AG.” Probably the main reason for forbearance, as always, was financial success. In 1967, after twenty-eight consecutive months of increases (pumped by cut-rate subscriptions), circulation had topped a million and the magazine reported profits of \$3.4 million, up from a loss of almost a half million five years earlier.

Polsgrove notes Hayes’s antipathy to public feminism — “127th on my list of priorities,” he wrote in a speech in the early seventies, “somewhere down there below prison reform and smog control” — arguably a useful failing in the editor of a men’s magazine. Nevertheless, he hired women as editors over the years and assigned women writers “non-female” subjects.

I wish Polsgrove had paid more attention to the heating up of the tone of American magazines like *Esquire* and *New York*, the print equivalent of voices in a restaurant rising to a shout

OPINION

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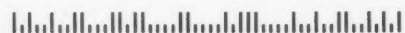
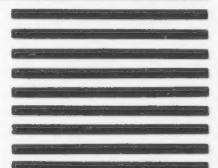
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in order to be heard across the table. Magazines' answer to television has been specialization and stridency — and television has responded in kind with its tabloid innovations. This search for mindless ways to be interesting has gone so far that Hayes's *Esquire* now looks like a visually sophisticated literary journal — as long as you don't look too closely, say, at the men's fashions or the fall back-to-college issues.

Hayes's departure from the magazine came because, in management's eyes, he overreached. He wanted to be Gingrich's successor as publisher, but also wanted to keep control of the editorial department. Gingrich believed strongly that Hayes should step aside as editor and make room for new blood, as Gingrich himself had done. Hayes asked for both jobs when the magazine was no longer hot: during the previous five years, *Newsweek* reported at the time, circulation had risen only 150,000. Management resisted giving him what he wanted, so he resigned, which appears to have been what management wanted him to do.

He worked in television for a few years, then finished out his career on the West Coast, as an editor of *California* magazine, and as a writer, notably of books on Africa and an article for *Life* about Dian Fossey that was the basis of the movie *Gorillas in the Mist*. In 1989, at sixty-two, he died of a brain tumor. His legacy to magazines was his vivid demonstration of what a strong editor can do to give a magazine itself, more than its individual articles and stories, a distinctive voice, personality, and attitude toward the world it mirrors and interprets. "Magazine editing is not just the act of choosing," he wrote, "it is an act of assertion." In the introduction to the collection of pieces from his tenure, *Smiling Through the Apocalypse*, Hayes summed up the magazine's passage through the decade: "Against the aridity of the national landscape of the late fifties we offered to our readers in our better moments the promise of outright laughter; by the end of the sixties the best we could provide was a bleak grin."

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Of Mice or Men?

by Stuart Schear

Science is a major enterprise in this society, involving big money (\$30 billion a year on biomedical research alone) and partisan politics (e.g., the ongoing debate over federally funded fetal tissue research). Power struggles over the scientific agenda are part of the story, too — scientists have long argued with one another, and, more recently, patients and animal rights activists have challenged medical researchers. If the battles over research dollars and scientific priorities seemed pitched during the '80s and early '90s, the meteoric rise of the new Speaker of the House

THE NEW SCIENCE JOURNALISTS

EDITED BY TED ANTON
AND RICK MCCOURT
BALLANTINE BOOKS
337 PP. \$12.50.

and his philosophy of "less government and more freedom" promise to spark even fiercer fights. On the cusp of the twenty-first century, some in Washington are seriously considering cutting one of every four public dollars now earmarked for science.

In this potentially contentious environment, the need for a well-funded and hard-hitting science beat is more urgent than ever. Yet the beat may be suffering a declining degree of support from the news industry, according to a 1992 report by the Scientists' Institute for Public Information (recently renamed the Media Resource Service). Half of all weekly science sections, it suggests, fell victim to the most recent recession — dropping from a high of ninety-five in 1989 to forty-seven in 1992.

Funding and formats aside, science journalism, like science itself, is of several minds when it comes to the world of politics. Essayists who explore the plant, insect, and animal kingdoms, the cosmos and other natural wonders tend to eschew politics. Writers who focus on portraying the "scientist-as-genius" are more intrigued by the exceptional individual than they are by the impact

of science on society. However, a growing number of journalists cover science as hard news. Like their colleagues on the politics and business desks, these science reporters relish the opportunity to sort through the political, economic, institutional, and social agendas influencing science and science policy. If there is truly a "new science journalism," it is this last group that deserves the mantle, since they are pushing the field well beyond its traditional boundaries.

A sampling of each of these approaches is found in the pages of *The New Science Journalists* — an anthology of previously published newspaper and magazine articles and excerpts from books by an impressive roster of science writers. Almost without exception, the anthology's offerings make for reading of the most engaging sort.

One selection is a delightfully written essay by Natalie Angier of *The New York Times* that places human laziness in context by surveying the insect and animal kingdoms. Author Diane Ackerman artfully explains why leaves change colors. Paul Hoffman, the editor of *Discover*, explores the eccentricities of mathematician Paul Erdos in an article for *The Atlantic Monthly*. Similarly, John Seabrook of *The New Yorker* traverses the odd mind of Microsoft's Bill Gates in "E-Mail From Bill." A hard-hitting story by John Crewdson of the *Chicago Tribune* reveals fraud in one of the nation's most significant research studies on the treatment of breast cancer. Two reporters for *The Hartford Courant*, Robert S. Capers and Eric Lipton, retrace the series of human errors and the political and budgetary pressures that led a team of technicians to misshape the mirror for the Hubble telescope.

The book's editors are two professors at Chicago's DePaul University:

Stuart Schear, a media fellow of the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, is the former health and science reporter for *The MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour*.

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Ted Anton, who teaches nonfiction writing, and Rick McCourt, a biologist. Both are accomplished science writers with an array of publishing and broadcast credits. Despite their considerable experience, the editors did not seize the challenge of making the anthology more than a collection of other people's work. Their introductory essay — the book's only original contribution besides biographical sketches of the contributors — is a missed opportunity. It fails to offer either a comprehensive overview of the field or to make a forthright statement about where the editors think it is headed. At times, it makes careless use of comments by various writers who have been interviewed by the editors.

One such quote comes from Jon Franklin, who has won two Pulitzer Prizes for his work at the Baltimore *Evening Sun*. "Science," he says, "has become far too capable of jumping onto political or social fads, like AIDS, or the greenhouse effect, or the ozone hole." The editors included this quote without critique or comment, and the reader can only assume that they

believe that some of the attention paid to AIDS has been driven by a "social fad." Indeed, Anton and McCourt did not include one article on the biology of HIV or its brutal effects — a surprising and unexplainable lapse for an anthology on the "new science journalism," a field that has come of age in tandem with this pandemic.

Most likely the absence of entries on HIV and AIDS can be explained by the editors' overall aversion to stories that get into the nitty-gritty of public health. In all fairness, Anton and McCourt are not alone in making this judgment. Even though most people come into direct contact with the world of science through medicine, many science journalists do not believe that serious medical writing falls within the purview of science journalism. Moreover, preeminent organizations like the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the National Association of Science Writers (NASW) are reluctant to consider science-based medical stories for their science writing awards, if the entries edge too close to the topic of human health. A number of influen-

tial journalists disagree, including *Newsday's* Laurie Garrett, who is now president of the NASW. She and like-minded journalists have pressed these organizations to acknowledge what is happening on the beat. At the core of this dispute is a fundamental disagreement over what constitutes science journalism. The central question: Should the traditional parameters set down by the "hard sciences" stand, or should a more expansive and more journalistic approach prevail?

To its credit, *The New Science Journalists* recognizes the gutsy investigative reporting of the *Chicago Tribune's* Crewdson on scientific fraud, but it misses a number of other big stories in the controversial zone of the health sciences. The dramatic reemergence of tuberculosis — a great scientific and social detective story — is only touched on tangentially in an excellent story on antibiotics. Completely ignored are the biological underpinnings of psychiatric illness and neurological disorders, which have been written about by no less a literary master than Oliver Sacks and by the aforementioned Jon Franklin in a Pulitzer Prize-winning series in 1985. Bioethics also gets short shrift; the study of human sexuality and the causation of sexual orientation are likewise never mentioned. Stories about the impact of science policy on the poor, non-whites, and non-Americans are nowhere to be found, save one essay on global warming. From this list of excluded topics, one gets the sense that the editors are simply unfamiliar or uncomfortable with stories about how a variety of humans are affected by science. Remarkably, there is more to be found here on biodiversity than human diversity. Ants, bees, monkeys, chimps, and bats are fascinating and important scientific subjects, but so are ordinary human beings.

In the end, *The New Science Journalists* suffers from an editorial myopia that limits its vision of science journalism. As Elissa Ely, a young doctor, explains in her *Boston Globe* essay, "Dreaming of Disconnecting a Respirator," "No action in the ICU is neutral." Clearly, Ely's insight pertains to actions taken in newsrooms and publishing houses, too.

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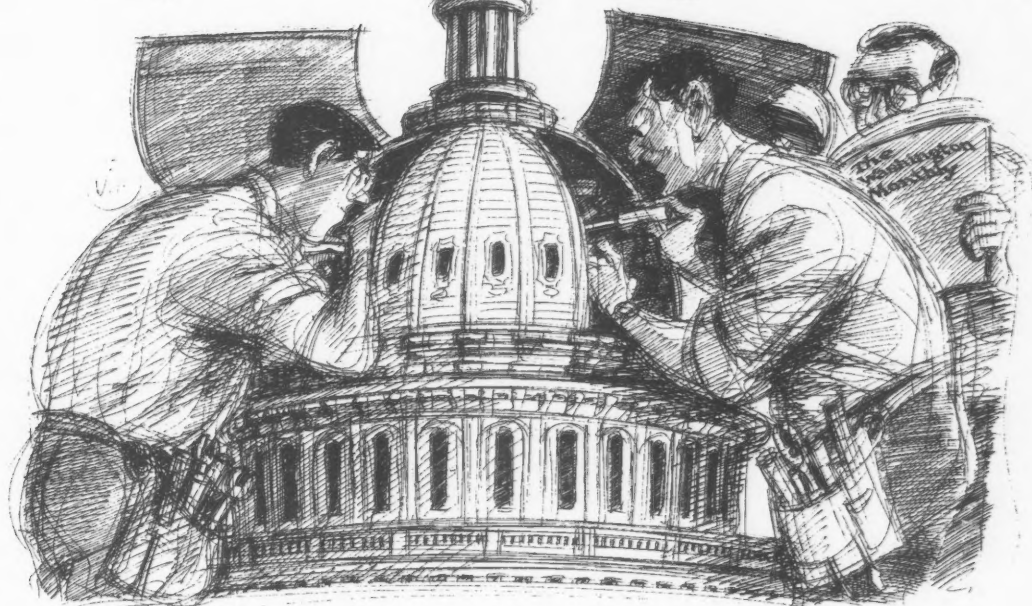
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SHORT TAKES

USED PEOPLE

He picked up a hamburger he'd ordered and took a bite. A trickle of grease ran from his lip. "What if they used us?" he said.

The grease reached the part of his chin where his sense of feeling was intact, and he wiped at it with his napkin.

"What if we used them?" I said. "That's the game, isn't it? You use them, they use you. . . ."

"It isn't always like that," he said. "It doesn't have to be . . ." He thought a moment, perhaps trying to remember a case when it wasn't.

"It's like fishing," I said. "You really aren't up to it if you start out worrying about the worm."

He leaned across the table, lowering his voice. "You haven't seen it when you get it exactly right, Jack," he said. "When you get things down just the way they were . . ."

"What then?" I said.

He smiled at me, his chin shining with grease. "It makes it bearable," he said.

FROM **THE PAPERBOY**, A NOVEL BY PETE DEXTER. RANDOM HOUSE 307 PP. \$23.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

In 1938 Winston Churchill published his collected speeches under the title *Arms and the Covenant*. His American publisher felt that an American audience would not be drawn to that title and asked Churchill for an alternative. (For anyone who has ever sat in on an editorial meeting at a publishing house, this story, while perhaps apocryphal, is certainly not improbable.) Churchill wired back, "THE YEARS OF THE LOCUST," which was misread by the cable operator and came through as "THE YEARS OF THE LOTUS." The editors confessed among themselves that while they did not understand Churchill's meaning they would honor the intent. Because the lotus, in Greek legend, was thought to induce sleep, the book was published in America as *While England Slept*, and was hugely successful.

FROM **NOW ALL WE NEED IS A TITLE: FAMOUS BOOK TITLES AND HOW THEY GOT THAT WAY**, BY ANDRE BERNARD. W.W. NORTON & COMPANY. 127 PP. \$15.95.





A ROYAL PAIN

"I was so frightened it was going to be in the press," Maïtre Blum said to me. "Day and night the journalists keep telephoning. The press give me no peace. Whenever the Duchess goes into the American Hospital, they telephone me day and night. They want to know what's wrong with her."

Maïtre Blum quite suddenly seemed to forget she was giving a press interview and she became naively confidential. She told me that it was always a problem deciding how best to palm off the press. She invariably said that the Duchess of Windsor was in hospital with appendicitis. Maïtre Blum often worried that the press might not be satisfied with this statement. Maïtre Blum had claimed the Duchess of Windsor was in the hospital with acute appendicitis too many times before. She feared the journalists might find it odd if they were told the Duchess's appendix was being continually removed.

FROM **THE LAST OF THE DUCHESS**, BY CAROLINE BLACKWOOD. PANTHEON BOOKS. 295 PP. \$23.

SCOOP'S SCOOP

Although he made much of his scorn for the press and its workings, Evelyn was by nature competitive and by his own lights did his best to do a good job. In this he was not as incompetent as he liked to make out, the *Mail* running over sixty of his cables between 24 August and 20 November 1935. Desperate for copy, he and Patrick hired a couple of professional informants to keep them supplied with stories, but as industrious as their two spies were, neither Waugh nor Balfour quite dared to relay to London a report that twenty-four Japanese officers had landed secretly and were proceeding towards the Ogaden, or that a mutiny among the boy scouts had been put down single-handedly by the eleven-year-old Duke of Harar armed with a machine gun. (As Balfour cynically observed in his account of the war, "If you were conscientious you searched for some confirmation of such fantasies before telegraphing them to



London. If you were not you telegraphed them to New York as they were.")

During the rest of his time in Abyssinia, Evelyn succeeded once more in getting hold of an important story, but this time it was the paper's fault, not his, that it was never used. Count Vinci, as a reward for the *Mail*'s support, gave exclusively to Waugh advance warning that he was intending to withdraw his staff and leave the country. This was crucially significant information, infallibly indicating that Italy was at last preparing to invade. Knowing that the wireless operators would have no compunction in making his scoop available to

any hack prepared to pay, Evelyn hit on the cunning expedient of transmitting his copy in Latin. Unfortunately the sub-editor in London who received it, assuming it was some kind of incomprehensible joke, spiked the story.

FROM **EVELYN WAUGH: A BIOGRAPHY**, BY SELINA HASTINGS. HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY. 724 PP. \$40.

HALTING HUMOR

On one memorable occasion half a dozen reporters were flown to Oran in North Africa for the occasion of King George VI's visit to the troops in North Africa. We were all assembled, about sixteen of us, at a British officers' club in Oran where we were to meet the king.

One of the reporters who had flown down was the incomparable Homer Bigart. It is important to this story to remind you that both King George and Homer stammered badly. Both of them had great difficulty getting out their words.

In the lineup of reporters, I stood to Homer's right and, as the king started down the receiving line, I heard his greeting to Bob Considine of International News Service.

"How ... how ... how ... da ... da ... do you ... you do?" the king stammered. "Who ... who ... whom ... da ... da ... do you ... rep ... rep ... repre ... represent?"

"The International News Service, sir," Bob said.

The king moved on to the next reporter and repeated his question.

After having spoken to seven or eight people, he came to the ninth man and said simply "How ... how do ... do you do?" and moved on without asking a question.

The next two people were asked their affiliations and then it was my turn.

"The U.S. Army newspaper," I said in answer to his hesitating question, "*The Stars and Stripes*." Next man was Homer.

"How ... how ... are ... are ya ... ya ... you?" the king said to Homer and moved on.

Later, Homer, who always put everyone listening to him at ease with his sense of humor, said, "It's a ga ... it's a ga ... goddamn ... good thing, ta too. There cacould ... ha ... have ... ba been ... an inter ... international ... in ... incident."

FROM **MY WAR**, BY ANDY ROONEY. TIMES BOOKS. 288 PP. \$25.

The Perfect Health Care Plan

Businesses and consumers seeking quality health benefits at an affordable price are finding it with managed care plans offered by Blue Cross and Blue Shield companies.

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Managed care has gained acceptance nationally and in many areas of New York State as the preferred option of health care delivery because it coordinates patients' care with quality and cost controls in a competitive environment with the goal of gaining and retaining consumer loyalty.

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The Lower case

First lady donates ball gown to the Smithsonian



The Philadelphia Inquirer 3/7/95

The relationship between the two dormitory roommates had soured recently when the murder victim, stabbed 45 times, decided she would room with someone else next year.

The Herald-Sun (Durham, N.C.) 5/30/95

Parking lot floods when man bursts

The Herald-Sun (Durham, N.C.) 2/4/94

Meanwhile, a second person who had worked for passage of the law has died in the past three months of legal wrangling.

The Oregonian (Portland) 4/19/95

Bad coupling cause of fire

Gaylord (Mich.) *Herald Times* 4/27/95

Council wants planners shrunk slowly

Auburn (Calif.) *Journal* 5/2/95

Plan to deny welfare to immigrants still alive

The Grand Rapids (Mich.) *Press* 1/15/95

Why do we tolerate demeaning gays, women?

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel 5/20/95

Tahoe-area man sentenced to 28 years in Calif.

Reno (Nev.) *Gazette-Journal* 5/4/95

Correction

It was incorrectly reported last Friday that today is T-shirt Appreciation Day. In fact, it is actually Teacher Appreciation Day.

Daily Vidette (Illinois State University) 4/19/95

Spot Searches Dog Bus Riders

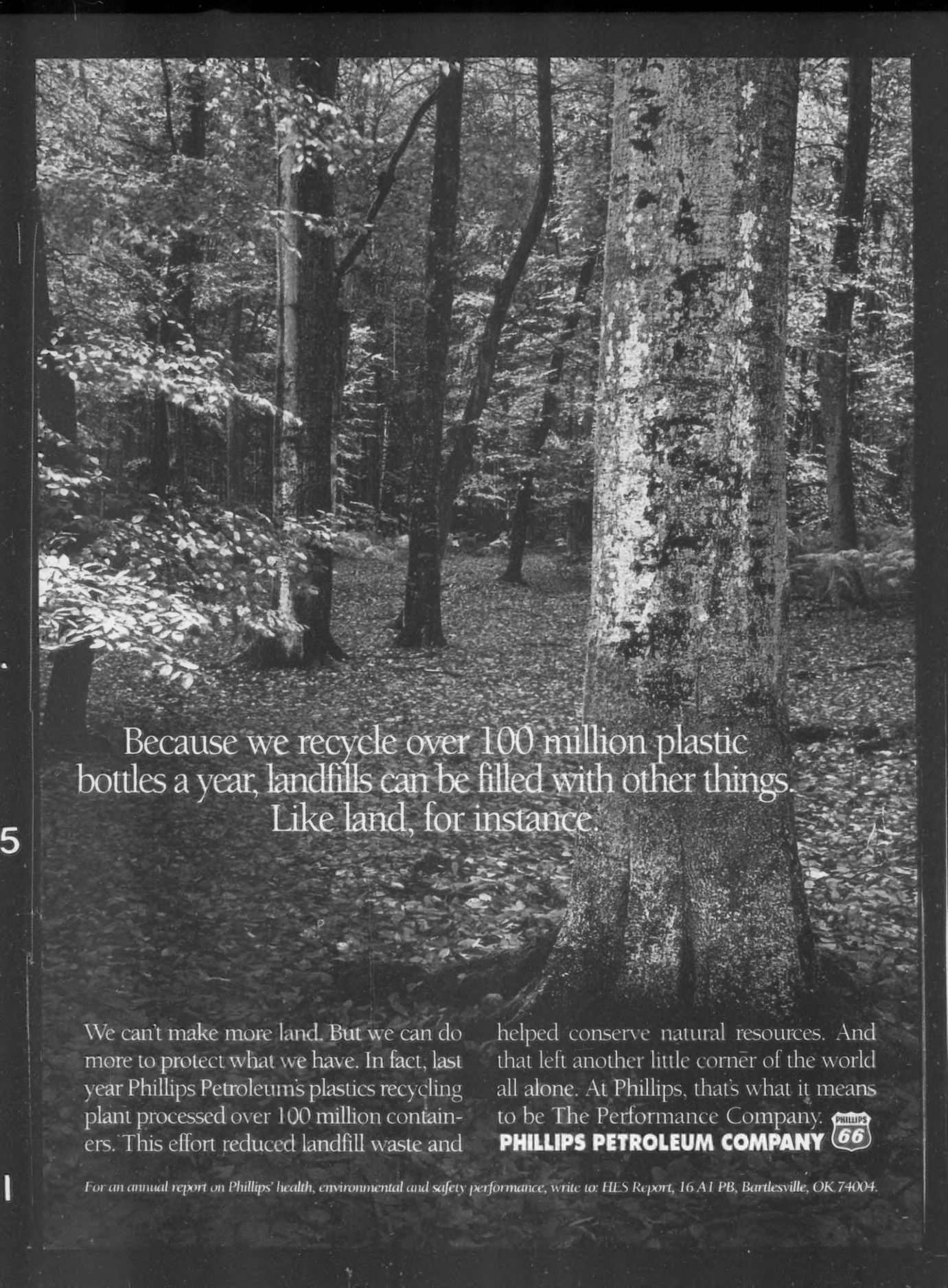
Isthmus (Madison, WI) 4/28/95



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